Changed in Migration?
Philippine Return Migrants and
(Un)Democratic Remittances

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Abstract

The link between development and migration has been termed the 'new development mantra'. Studies on the subject have so far mostly focused on economic remittances, and the potential consequences of return migration on democratisation have been rarely touched upon. This article attests the potential of the migration experience to affect migrants' attitudes towards democracy, thus playing an important role in the diffuse support needed for democracies in the stage of consolidation. Based on a survey among 1,000 Philippine return migrants from six destinations, the paper suggests that the migration experience may not only lead to a more critical stance towards the political system of the home country; there are also indicators of lesser support for the principles of democracy when compared to migrants about to leave the country for the first time. The political system of the destination as such seems to be a less decisive factor than the specific freedoms and restrictions experienced by migrants and a potential bias when selecting the destination. The article focuses on return migrants from Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong and Japan, which showed the most distinctive numbers in support of democracy or changes therein when compared to first-time migrants heading for that destination.1

Keywords
Migration, development, democratisation, norm diffusion, transnationalism, political remittances.

1) The article is based on the findings of the research project 'Democratisation through Migration?' conducted between 2005 and 2007 by the Arnold-Bergstraesser Institute Freiburg, Germany, in cooperation with Social Weather Stations (SWS), Quezon City. Funding was provided by the Foundation Population, Migration and Environment, based in Stäfa, Switzerland. Project members were Jürgen Rüland, Christl Kessler and the author.
Introduction

Return migrants are frequently praised as agents of development by researchers and international institutions, and this potential role has been strongly advocated by the World Bank. The focus in this discussion has been mostly on economic factors, especially on remittances. In a much cited paper, Devesh Kapur has raised the question of whether remittances can be seen as 'the new development mantra'. He came to the conclusion: 'Remittances are one of the most visible—and beneficial—aspects of how international migration is reshaping the countries of origin.' However, Kapur's subscription to the new 'mantra' is of a limited kind; while the money sent home by migrants might alleviate transient poverty, he rates its beneficial effect in eradicating structural poverty as much more uncertain. Instead, the author finds it 'worth reflecting whether it is the less visible, non-quantifiable and intangible remittances—namely social remittances or the flow of ideas—that have a more critical impact than their pecuniary counterpart? Since the 'overseas experience has undoubtedly some cognitive effects on migrants', Kapur wonders if it is not rather at this level where the real effects of remittances can be felt. He mentions the potential that through mass migration not just elites but social groups at the lower end of the social spectrum are exposed to the flow of new ideas, while adding: 'But that is another story.'

The goal of this article is to contribute a hitherto neglected side to this emerging story. In recent years, there has been increasing scholarly attention paid to factors like 'social remittances' or 'political remittances', which Levitt has defined as 'the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving to sending countries communities'. But while these works have significantly widened the scope of the research on remittances, many of them seem to be based, somewhat contradictory, on a rather narrow view of migration. The implicit or explicit assumption appears to be the following: migrants from nondemocratic states seek work in the established democracies

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of the West. Through transnational connections or after their return, they can act as ‘collective agents of change’ by remitting ‘political ideas, such as ideas on forms of government, rights and responsibilities, and democracy’. Thus, ultimately migrants have the potential to be agents of democratisation.

This—admittedly simplified—picture neglects many scenarios that are an integral part of the ‘age of migration’. While it lies in the very nature of labour migration that migrants choose destinations that are more economically developed than their home country, this does not necessarily hold true for the political system. Since the oil crisis in the 1970s, Gulf states like Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have attracted a constant flow of construction workers and other labour migrants. Likewise, increasing female employment rates in destinations like Singapore or Hong Kong have contributed to the ‘globalisation of domestic work’ and the hiring of large numbers of household workers from abroad. Neither of these destinations can be labelled democratic. Besides, even a stay in a clearly democratic country might not necessarily provide migrants with ideal-type ideas of government and democracy if, as is commonly the case, there are quite different rules applied to residents and migrants.

This shows that social and political remittances can take on a wide range of qualities. Equally varied is the state of development and the political system in the origins of migration—two out of the three top sending countries of migrants (China, India, the Philippines) are democracies, although to what degree is contested academically as well as politically. Finally, there are numerous types of migration. While it seems plausible to attribute significant political remittances to, say, diaspora returnees after a transition of power in the homeland, little empirical research has been conducted on the effect of temporary labour migration on democratisation. In sum, democratisation has rarely been explicitly dealt with within the expanding literature on migration and development. And the lacunae are even more obvious the other way round: Within the democratisation discourse, migrants are almost non-existent (see below).

5) Thomas Faist, ‘Migrants as transnational development agents: an inquiry into the newest round of the migration-development nexus’, Population, Space and Place, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2008), pp. 26–27. Faist himself is critical of this view and sees the rationale behind it more in the convenient consequences for the countries of destination: ‘The migration-development link is usually mentioned in its function to reduce the propensities for migration to Europe’ (p. 37).

In this article, I will try to address these so far under-researched issues. By drawing on data from the project ‘Democratisation through Migration’, I will discuss the experiences and political attitudes of return migrants from a democratic, an authoritarian and a semi-democratic destination—Japan, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong respectively—to the Philippines. In the literature, the country is seen as either a democracy in the process of consolidation or, as Croissant puts it, a ‘defective democracy’ in stagnation.\(^7\) To this regard, I will first situate this study in the discourse on external factors of democratisation. In a second step I will briefly describe the project design and discuss Philippine democracy and migration politics. This is followed by the results for the three case studies. In the final section I will discuss under which circumstances migrants’ political attitudes might change or be changed towards a more democratic or undemocratic direction.

**Migrants as External Factors of Democratisation**

In a very recent volume on the subject, Marianne Kneuer attests the research on external factors of democratisation to have been a long-neglected topic.\(^8\) In the literature on democratisation and transition there has been a long-lasting consensus that internal factors, especially cleavages and power shifts within the governing elites, are the main factors contributing to democratic transition.\(^9\) But with the continuation of the ‘third wave of democratisation’,\(^10\) external dimensions have gained some prominence—Kneuer even acknowledges a certain recent ‘boom’ in the research, caused mainly by the end of the Cold War as well as the invasion in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq. These key events have led to increased interest in the subject of democracy assistance or promotion,

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\(^8\) Marianne Kneuer, ‘*Externe Faktoren der Demokratisierung—zum Stand der Forschung*’ (External factors of democratisation—current state of research), in Gero Erdmann and Marianne Kneuer (eds), *Externe Faktoren der Demokratisierung* (External Factors of Democratisation) (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009), pp. 9–35.


with Laurence Whitehead being the pioneer in the field of external factors.\textsuperscript{11} In 2002, Peter Schraeder stated that the literature mostly focused on the evolving ‘democracy promotion industry’, fuelled by the financial contributions of Western donor countries and by the efforts of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the United Nations (UN); these democracy promoters centred their efforts mostly on states, institutions and elites and acted out of economic self-interest.\textsuperscript{12}

The scope of research has widened since, but in her overview Kneuer still lists a considerable number of almost blank spots: Especially when dealing with the consolidation phase of democracies, authors like Larry Diamond rather assume than research the role of external factors.\textsuperscript{13} And while the literature on Europeanisation has expanded in recent years, Kneuer attests the research still focuses mostly on institutional and policy-specific effects within the ‘old’ EU member states.\textsuperscript{14} Furthermore, the studies concentrate on the state-to-state-level, top-down processes and an intentional exercise of influence.\textsuperscript{15} In their concluding chapter, Erdmann and Kneuer diagnose a lack of empirical evidence; furthermore, they see the interaction between the internal and external factors as the missing link in democratisation.\textsuperscript{16}

The research project ‘Democratisation through Migration?’ aimed to address these blank spots. It deals with external factors affecting the democratisation process of a democracy in the state of consolidation, the Philippines. The factors researched are neither on the state-to-state nor institutional—and thus top-down—level, but are rather bottom-up, looking at the role of ordinary


\textsuperscript{13} Larry Diamond, ’Introduction: In search of consolidation’, in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, Yun-han Chu and Hung-mao Tien (eds), Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. xiii–xlvii. For the critique, see Kneuer, Stand der Forschung, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{14} See Kneuer, Stand der Forschung, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{15} Kneuer, Stand der Forschung, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{16} Gero Erdmann and Marianne Kneuer, ‘Externe Faktoren der Demokratisierung: Forschungsperspektiven und Entwicklungspotenzial’ (External factors of democratisation: research perspectives and research potential), in Erdmann and Kneuer, Externe Faktoren, pp. 320 and 335.
people, i.e. labour migrants, and their political attitudes, norms and values. By assuming that these may be affected by the experience of migration, the research focuses on the unintended influence of this phenomenon. Finally, while it may certainly be worthwhile to search for the 'missing link', this research challenges the notion of a neat distinction between internal and external factors in the age of increasing transnational interactions. Political activism of migrants is a case in point: if they try to advocate for political change while abroad, is this a purely external factor? And if they return to their home country with different 'democratic baggage' and attitudes caused by their stay abroad, should they be regarded merely as an internal factor?

While it has become apparent that the existing literature on the nexus of democratisation and migration is scarce, there are some sources on which to draw. In the above-mentioned volume, Lauth and Pickel present a model of the 'diffusion of democracy'. They define diffusion, based on the work of Everett M. Rogers, as 'a process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time'. Diffusion is, unlike policy transfers or the specific form of 'governance by diffusion', usually a voluntary and unintended process, where an innovation seen as attractive is transferred from one country to another with a noticeable effect. As in the migration and development discourse, the authors clearly seem to have primarily positive effects in mind, while it could also be possible that not only 'democratic-innovative' but also 'authoritarian-backward' ideas and attitudes might be transferred by diffusion.

Lauth/Pickel list four possible ways through which diffusion might take place: through media, networks, secondary socialisation (such as education or work in companies), and migration. Migrants can be involved in distributing information and providing a first scheme of interpretation for the innovation considered as 'new' in their place of origin. Unfortunately, that is all the authors have to say about the role of migrants. Still, by linking access to international information and communication ('diffusion factor'), attitudes towards democracy and the actual state of democracy, based on data from the World Value Survey and the Freedom House Index, Pickel and Lauth

18) Lauth and Pickel, Diffusion, p. 40.
19) Radio Free Europe being an example.
20) Lauth and Pickel, Diffusion, pp. 40–42.
come to the conclusion that diffusion can play an important part in the process of democratisation. Diffusion can have this effect by serving as a transmitter and supporting factor for modernisation processes that in turn have a positive effect on democracy. Thus, they see diffusion as an exogenous factor for democratisation, carrying opinions, values and expectations that can have an endogenous effect.\(^{21}\)

Even if one does not fully subscribe to the strict endogenous/exogenous distinction, the sole focus on democracy-supporting social remittances in diffusion and the inherent connection between modernisation and democratisation, there is still the notion that values can be transported through diffusion on a non-state, non-intentional level, carried for example by migrants. Which role could these actors play in the process of democratisation in their home country after their return? This question leads to the works of Christian Welzel, a member of the World Value Survey, and Ronald Inglehart, its director. Both have examined ‘the role of ordinary people in democratisation’ and the potential effect of mass attitudes on levels of democracy.\(^{22}\)

Welzel states that the idea that mass attitudes affect societies’ chances to attain and sustain democracy is the central premise of an entire school of thought in political culture, albeit a rarely tested one.\(^{23}\) The basic assumption is that when pro-democratic attitudes are more widespread in a society, this society is more likely to attain and/or to sustain high levels of democracy. One example would be the potential of the masses to shift the power balances between pro-democratic and anti-democratic forces. But this notion might have only limited value for countries, like the Philippines, that have been described as illiberal ‘defective democracies’,\(^{24}\) and where the electorate—not without reason—views all political forces as corrupt and undermining democracy, differing only in the degree in which they do so.

Welzel and Inglehart state that liberal—as opposed to electoral—democracy is based on mass voice in self-governance: ‘The emergence and survival of democracy therefore depends on social preconditions such as the wide

\(^{21}\) Lauth and Pickel, *Diffusion*, p. 68.


distribution of participatory resources and a trusting, tolerant public that prizes free choice.\textsuperscript{25} At the very least, democracy needs what Easton/Dennis call \textit{the diffuse support} that a political system receives because citizens embrace the values and norms underlying the political order.\textsuperscript{26} Welzel agrees with this basic necessity: "Even if one admits that democracy is ultimately attained and sustained through pro-democratic actions, these actions must be motivated in some way by pro-democratic attitudes."\textsuperscript{27} And writing on the consolidation of democracy, Linz \textit{et al.} note that this process involves 'substantial attitudinal support for and behavioral compliance with the democratic institutions and the "rules of the game" which they establish'.\textsuperscript{28}

The \textit{diffuse support} has to be differentiated from the \textit{specific support} of the political system. In a defective democracy, the people might be rightfully critical of the way the system works without questioning the fundamental values of democracy. On the other hand, the degree of satisfaction with the output performance of a political system might influence the degree to which the masses support this system and therefore the degree to which they form a stabilising force within the society. Here, the migrants come into the picture: It can be assumed that significant numbers of labour migrants would not go abroad in the first place if the political system worked to their satisfaction by providing ample economic and employment opportunities. It can also be assumed that the countries of destination are doing a better job in delivering these goods, at least to their citizens. Thus, comparing the performance of the host country with the one of their origin—and possibly linking this to the respective political systems—might also influence the political remittances of the migrants.

For that to happen, the migration experience must have a lasting impression on the political attitudes of the migrants. Kapur as well as Lauth and Pickel takes that possibility as given, without tackling the issue of political socialisation. There is widespread consensus in the literature on political socialisation that political values and attitudes are acquired at an early age through

\textsuperscript{25} Welzel and Inglehart, \textit{Ordinary people}, p. 126.


\textsuperscript{27} Welzel, \textit{Mass attitudes}, p. 408.

family and educational institutions. But there is also evidence that this can be significantly altered at a later stage by exposure to crises and shocks—for which international labour migration, that is, staying extended periods in an unfamiliar environment under often stressful conditions, can be a major example. David Easton and Jack Dennis describe socialisation as ‘learning for life’ and Clausen stresses that political socialisation does not necessarily follow a biographical linearity—which is especially true in the case of migrants. Their move to another country, although temporary but often the first trip abroad, can be seen as a drastic biographical change. Clausen also describes the potential of the quasi-symbiotic relationship between state and society, in which political socialisation takes place. Therefore it can be argued that being excluded from that network between state and society or having only limited access to it, as is the situation for many migrants while abroad, can have an influence on the political socialisation as well.

To sum up, it can be said that researchers dealing with external factors for democratisation tend to be optimistic in nature. While this is a laudable trait, their models and approaches in no way become invalid when also used to check for negative effects of diffusion, mass attitudes or people power. The literature mentioned is therefore in many regards compatible with the hypotheses that migration has the potential to alter or to strengthen existing political attitudes, and that the degree and direction of such changes in attitudes are dependent on migrants’ individual experience and on the political system of the host country. These attitudes are relevant for the process of democratisation because, in countries like the Philippines with labour outmigration that is increasing


31) Easton and Dennis, Children in the Political System.

in numbers as well as contract-based and therefore of a temporary nature, the return migrants constitute a critical number of the ‘masses’. And their support, be it diffuse, specific or even manifested in political action, is crucial for the way democracy is sustained or attained. It could even be said that migrants are especially responsive to the state of democracy in their home country: It might be the reason for them to leave, be it for political or economical reasons, it might affect the regulation of the migration process and it might be judged in a new light by the migrants after their return.

Democratisation in the Migration Context

It is therefore somewhat surprising that only a few authors explicitly connect migration and democratisation. The concept of diffusion has been incorporated in the discussion of social remittances, which Levitt defines as a ‘local-level, migration-driven form of cultural diffusion’. One exception is José Itzigsohn: In an article jointly written with Daniela Villacrés he discusses the role of migrants as ‘new and unaccounted power groups’. But both case studies—the Dominican Republic and El Salvador—deal with migrants who have more or less settled in the United States. Even if these migrants influence the politics of their sending countries at the local (e.g. infrastructural projects initiated by hometown associations) and national level (absentee voting rights) they are part of a diaspora that has little intention to return for good. Similar observations about migration and democratisation to those made above can be found in Ewa Morawska’s article ‘International migration and the consolidation of democracy’, which has undeservedly gained only little feedback so far. When examining the relationship between westbound international migration and the consolidation of democracy in contemporary East Central Europe (ECE), the author wondered why this interrelation had remained outside the purview of either democratic transition/consolidation or international migration anal-

33) Or rather de-regulation when looking at the unrestricted way the ‘migration industry’ can operate in many sending countries.
34) Levitt, Social remittances, p. 926.
yses. This statement still holds true eight years after the article was published, although Morawska diagnosed an 'apparently “natural” affinity of these phenomena': Since the destination of the vast majority of ECE migrants was the Western societies, which are also the source of the ideas and practice models of democracy for ECE, it 'should be reasonable to expect that migrants' Western travels provide an opportunity for “participant” observation of the everyday operation of democratic societies; an experience which these migrants transplant upon return to their home countries'.37 Her claim is rooted in historical observations, according to which during the period of mass economic migrations from that region to the West, especially the United States (1880–1914), emigrants and returnees played an active role in the development of democratic ideas and practices in their home countries. Returning with a newly acquired sense of individuality, these migrants started initiatives for democratisation at the local and national levels, from the creation of People's Houses for adult education to the participation in labour unions, while having a 'demonstration effect' on their countrymen.38

But paradoxically, Morawska argues, when looking at the current migration from the ECE to the West, 'the relationship between westbound travels of a vast majority of migrants and democratization in their home countries has weakened'.39 One reason is that westbound migration may have helped to deflate possible protests 'from below' against the traumas of economic transformation; migration may thus have served as a pressure valve by providing subsidiary work and income abroad.40 The second argument is more complex: Morawska points to the enduring syndrome of practices that were survival strategies in the communist period as perhaps the greatest obstacle to the consolidation of democracy 'from below'. These practices—termed the ‘homo sovieticus syndrome’—include popular distrust of public institutions, widespread civic apathy and the widely accepted social norms of 'beating the system' and 'going around the law'.41

Morawska draws from a wide range of sources to support her argument, among them numerous studies and informal interviews with their authors, to make up for the fact that for a considerable number of these sources there were

few references to the question of democracy/democratisation.\textsuperscript{42} She cites as the purpose of her study 'to initiate a conversation between specialists in transnational migration and experts in democratization' since there are 'epistemic and possible policy gains which can result from the rapprochement of these two fields of inquiry'.\textsuperscript{43} The aim of the research project 'Democratisation through Migration?' is to contribute to this conversation and provide quantitative and qualitative data gathered specifically with the nexus of the two research fields in mind.

Democratisation through Migration?

The research project aimed to explore the potential effects of international labour migration on democratisation. The initial hypotheses of the project assumed that migration has the potential to alter or to strengthen existing political attitudes and that the degree and direction of such changes in attitudes are dependent on migrants' individual experience and on the political system of the host country. The Philippines were chosen for several reasons as the country of origin: it is seen as 'the world's labour exporter par excellence'\textsuperscript{44} and 'perhaps the prototype of a labour-exporting country'.\textsuperscript{45} Philippine labour migration is anything but a new phenomenon—there is a long tradition of permanent or temporary contract labour migration that can be analysed as having taken place in three consecutive waves.\textsuperscript{46} Labour migration on a notable scale began shortly after the US took over as colonial power at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the first Filipinos found employment as plantation workers in Hawaii and later on in California. The second wave started after

\textsuperscript{42} See Morawska, \textit{International migration and consolidation}, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{43} Morawska, \textit{International migration and consolidation}, pp. 189–190.
the end of World War II, when highly skilled Filipinos migrated to the USA, to US military bases or to Australia, which resulted in a significant 'brain drain'.

In the 1970s, these measures were followed directly by the third wave, which has continued to gain momentum until the present day and displayed a new quality in comparison to its predecessors: Until this wave, the Philippine state had taken only reactive measures to face an already existing phenomenon; now, the state took on a much more active role and acted as a 'labour broker'.

The aim of the large-scale Overseas Employment Programme was to specifically advance temporary labour migration. President Ferdinand Marcos installed the programme as a response to increasing unemployment, rapid population growth and declining wages in the Philippines, with the added benefit of raising the foreign currency stock through remittances. Although since then a huge state apparatus has been built up with the goal of managing and to a degree protecting labour migrants, at their core these policies have continued until today. Thus, they also fulfil the above-mentioned function of a 'pressure valve' for the democratically elected governments since the 'People Power' Revolution in 1986. The first elected president after the transition, Corazon Aquino, introduced the term 'national heroes' for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and the current government under Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has by now exceeded its goal to deploy more than one million migrants annually. While this deployment is often the starting point for a cycle of continuous circular migration, migrants frequently spend prolonged periods back in the Philippines or return for good. Thus, the sheer size of this group (there are currently approximately 3.5 million OFWs) and its widespread distribution within Philippine society (with varied social status, sex, age, regional origin) make labour migration a suitable subject for studying the diffuse support needed for democratic consolidation.

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49 Stefan Rother, 'Arbeitsmigration zwischen Nationalstaat und Global Migration Governance: Das Beispiel des Entsendelndes Philippinen' (Labor migration between the nation-state and global migration governance: the case of a sending state, the Philippines), in Heribert Weiland, Ingrid Wehr and Matthias Seifert (eds), Good Governance in der Sackgasse? (Good Governance as a Dead-End Street?) (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009), p. 218.
Research Design

The research design combined quantitative as well as qualitative methods. A standardised questionnaire was administered in face-to-face interviews with 1,000 OFWs. Respondents were selected according to country of destination, length of stay abroad and time spent after returning home to the Philippines. The sample comprised migrants to Japan, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Hong Kong. Criteria for the selection of destinations were their political system and their relevance as a destination for Philippine labour migrants (based on the number of yearly new hires and rehires). A key criterion for selection was that countries and territories of destination must be either democratic or authoritarian. This distinction was based on Freedom House ratings, which rate countries with a score between 1 and 2.5 as ‘free’ and hence democratic, and between 5 and 7 as ‘non-free’ and hence authoritarian. Hong Kong, as neither a clearly democratic nor a clearly authoritarian destination, was not included in the original design. It was selected as a substitute for a third clearly democratic destination, the United Kingdom, and subsequently the whole of the European Union. In both cases it turned out to be impossible to identify the necessary quota of return migrants meeting the criteria within a reasonable timespan. The Special Administrative Region (SAR) was chosen as a replacement since it promised to be a distinctive case with high relevance to the issue of mass attitudes towards democratisation: Hong Kong attracts large numbers of Filipino labour migrants and, thanks to a comparatively liberal migration regime, the OFWs in the SAR exhibit high levels of political organisation.50

The respondents had to have been in possession of legal papers, to have worked for at least two consecutive years in their respective destinations exclusively, and to have left the Philippines after 31 December 1992. As the migration regulations for Japan did not allow migrants to stay for more than six months continuously, the criteria for migrants to Japan was altered to 24 months within a time period of four years. The starting year of 1993 was chosen to ensure that the respondents had witnessed at least one democratic transition in power, which in the democratisation literature is regarded as the culmination of the transition phase to democracy and a prerequisite to enter the phase

of democratic consolidation. In 1992 Fidel V. Ramos was elected president of the Philippines, following Corazon Aquino. The respondents were required to have returned to the Philippines at least 12 months prior to the interview. In order to fulfil this requirement, they had to have left their host country in early 2005. A quota for the gender ratio within each country group was based on the gender ratio of outgoing migrants for the respective countries between 1993 and 2003.

Ideally, the same group of migrants would have been asked before their departure and after their return in a panel survey in order to see if and in what way their political attitudes had changed. Since this would have taken an unpredictable amount of time and resources, 'statistical twins' were chosen instead. This control group, which was modelled with regard to age group, gender and education for each destination, consisted of 1,000 respondents who had already signed contracts as OFWs at the time of the interview and were awaiting their departure. In the following, the latter are referred to as the sample of First Timers, while the sample of OFWs is referred to as Return Migrants or Returnees. Thirty-seven of the Return Migrants were interviewed a second time using rather open, unstructured guidelines. The interviews were conducted in Tagalog and conducted, transcribed and translated by advanced students and staff of the University of the Philippines in Quezon City. These in-depth interviews (IDIs) provided a separate database for qualitative analysis as well as a background for interpreting the findings of the survey. Selection criteria for these interviews were the answers to queries regarding political items in the questionnaire.

Common Theme: The Grass is Significantly Greener Abroad

Among the results of the research, there were several significant findings that hold true regardless of the destination of migration. It comes as little surprise that no matter how long and how often the OFWs had been abroad, financial and economic reasons were consistently the main motivation. Respondents were asked to rank a list of possible reasons for migration on the basis of their importance for their own decision to work abroad. Here, providing financial support for my family was the uncontested number one reason for migration, with 68 per cent of respondents ranking this as their most important reason.

51 Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); O'Donnell et al., Transitions from Authoritarian Rule.
More strikingly, in all aspects covered, all host countries and territories were rated far more positively than the Philippines. (See Figure 1) These aspects were effectiveness in dealing with economic difficulties, level of crime, trust in police, social security system and system of government (see below). While it might be expected that Return Migrants rate economically more developed destinations higher than the Philippines (although economic development is not necessarily equivalent with a trustworthy police and personal safety), migration experience clearly affected the judgement of the performance of the Philippine political system. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that First Timers ranked the political performance of the Philippines consistently higher than Return Migrants. Thus, while 76 per cent of the Return Migrants ranked the system of government in their host country as good or very good, only 10 per cent offered the same judgement for the Philippines, compared to 25 per cent of the First Timers. (See Figure 2)

The data on the assessment of political performance by migrants clearly show that there is a deep discontent with the Philippine polity and that this dissatisfaction is intensified by the migration experience. The experience of a society with a functioning economy and providing for the material needs of its citizens makes migrants more demanding towards their own political system, regardless of the political system of their host country. Thus, when the destination of migrants is the yardstick against which the political system of the home country is measured, and this comparison unequivocally turns out in favour of the destinations, it is worth investigating whether the political attitudes of the Returnees are changed in migration as well. In the following section I will com-
Figure 2. Comparison by Return Migrants Between the Philippines and Their Respective Host Country: System of Government

pare three of the country-specific results from the survey by choosing a clearly authoritarian destination (Saudi Arabia), a clearly democratic one (Japan) and the ‘special case’ of Hong Kong, SAR.

Saudi Arabia: Lower Support for Democracy vs Importance of Freedom Rights

Saudi Arabia is ‘where it all started’: the initial destination of the third wave of Philippine labour migration remained the number one destination for OFWs during the entire time period covered by the survey, with around 190,000 new hires and rehires each year. This demonstrates the continuing dependency of the country on migrant workers and the well-established migration system that is in place with the Philippines. At the same time, Saudi Arabia is one of the worst countries in terms of compliance with migrants’ rights. Since a

\[1\) Question asked: ‘There are different systems of government, for example monarchy, presidential democracy and parliamentary democracy. Where (on a scale from very bad to very good) would you place the system of government in your OFW destination? And where the present system of government in the Philippines?’
\[52\) Interviews by the author with a CMA (Centre for Migrant Advocacy) spokesperson
very restrictive and illiberal interpretation of Islamic law is the only accepted approach to human rights, several major universally recognised human rights are not applicable. It thus does not come as a surprise that Saudi Arabia has still not signed the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Worse, the abuse of migrant workers, both physically and in terms of their employment, continues to be a constant theme, as is the case in the whole Gulf region.53

In 2004, Human Rights Watch published a report compiling interviews and field reports from migrants of several nationalities who had been working in Saudi Arabia.54 The report mentions systematic abuses of foreign workers in terms of underpayment, delay of payment, exorbitant broker fees, passport confiscation, inadequate accommodation, provision with food or water, and physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse. Often, the migrants were forced into the signing of a new contract in Arabic that they did not understand (contract substitution) and were placed in jobs for which they had no working permit. In many cases, employers tried to control the movement of their employees by confiscating their passports—all of these practices were also reported by Return Migrants from Saudi Arabia in the IDIs. Because of underpayment and the non-payment of wages, many migrants had to return to their home countries with no or little money.

The Saudi Arabian legal system was not at all favourable for migrants. Cases of abuse were handled as merely ‘family matters’. Saudi law denies the right to organise and bargain collectively. Since no independent association, NGO or trade union was allowed to operate until 2003, support for migrant workers was virtually non-existent. Finally, in March 2003, the first human rights organisation, the National Human Rights Association, was legitimised. Nevertheless, the Saudi Arabian government kept a tight rein on human rights activists and dissidents.

In the survey, Saudi Arabia was the only country or territory with male-dominated migration. Only 31 per cent of the migrants were female. It also had the second highest number of respondents with low levels of education:


17 per cent had no high school diploma. On the other hand, 42 per cent of the OFWs in Saudi Arabia were employed as skilled workers in craft, trade or agriculture or as skilled labourers, making it the country with the highest percentage in both categories.

Being an OFW in Saudi Arabia obviously has some major downsides, since the migration experience is more often considered negative than in the other countries and territories covered by the survey. Only 46 per cent of respondents reported good working conditions (63 per cent in total). The percentage of those who reported that they had never been treated unfairly was also significantly lower than average (42 per cent compared to 61 per cent), and the number of those always treated unfairly doubled in comparison, from 4 per cent to 8 per cent.

Part of the negative experience was the restriction of movement—19 per cent of the OFWs in Saudi Arabia were not allowed to move freely (total sample 10 per cent), and among the domestic workers this rose to as many as 37 per cent. Discrimination also seems to be a bigger problem than in all other host countries: 19 per cent felt most of the time or always that they had become victims of discrimination (11 per cent total). Saudi Arabia also has the highest frequency of OFWs reporting any kind of problems, with 32 per cent compared to 21 per cent total. With this list of negative experiences, it is no surprise that 70 per cent of the OFWs in Saudi Arabia suffered from maladjustment and found it difficult to cope (total sample 58 per cent).

OFWs could not expect much help from the local authorities: while 21 per cent of respondents reported that state agencies in the host country offered services for OFWs, Saudi Arabia ranked second lowest with 13 per cent. This stands in stark contrast to the problems encountered: migrants reported in the IDIs they had not been paid for months, because their employers were in financial difficulties. However, because their papers were with the employer, they were forced to stay on and work, rely on the allowances for food and hope that at some point they would receive their salary. The embassy of the Philippines was depicted as rather unhelpful in such instances.

In accordance with the quantitative data, the main theme of the IDI accounts about the time in Saudi Arabia were the strict rules on gender segregation, the strict enforcement of Saudi law and the omnipresent (religious) police in the country. The atmosphere that emerges from the interviews is characterised by a constant fear of getting involved with the police, a recurring theme

55 The total numbers refer to all six destinations.
being that of sexual abuse of both men and women by the police. Respondents dwelled on the strict rules and regulations concerning clothing, prayer times, alcohol and gambling, and contacts between men and women. There was unanimity in the assessment of these rules as too strict and as unacceptably restricting individual freedom, especially the rules concerning gender segregation. However, one could also sense a kind of admiration for the strictness of the rules and the way they were enforced. Others emphasised that the Saudi government cares for the poor—if they are citizens, that is—and supports them.

What influence might such an ambivalent but overall negative experience have on the democratic attitudes of the migrants? Apparently an alarmingly negative one: while 65 per cent of all Return Migrants chose the statement *democracy is always preferable to any kind of government*, only 49 per cent of migrants returning from Saudi Arabia selected this clearly ‘democratic’ answer. (See Figure 3.) When using an index on the rejection of authoritarian rule—based on the answers regarding options to abandon Congress and elections and replace them with a strong leader, experts or military government or a ban on the opposition—a similar picture emerges: for Return Migrants from Saudi Arabia there were 12 per cent low-rankers and only 19 per cent high-rankers (compared to 6 and 25 per cent total).

One possible explanation for these findings could be a bias on the part of respondents: Saudi Arabia seems to attract the ‘least democratic’ migrants, with only 68 per cent of the First Timers preferring democracy (73 per cent total).
This image is strengthened when looking at the index on the rejection of authoritarian rule, where OFWs heading to Saudi Arabia also had a bigger share of low-rankers (13 per cent compared to 6 per cent of all First Timers). But even with this potential bias in place, there is a strong indication that the migration experience might have made an impression, since the preference for democracy drops by 18 percentage points when comparing First Timer and Return Migrants—keeping in mind that this was not a panel investigation. Still, considering that OFWs returning from Saudi Arabia reported the worst migration experiences, the difference seems puzzling. But as became apparent in the IDIs, many migrants were very aware of how well almost all Saudi Arabian citizens were faring, that the law was upheld very strictly and that there was no political turmoil. Thus, the Gulf country might be an example for undemocratic diffusion: When one’s own esteem for democracy is comparatively low to start with—as is the case for First Timers heading to Saudi Arabia—it may be a plausible response to value the apparent advantages of an authoritarian system per se, even if as outsiders the respondents were unable to benefit from it.

When respondents were asked about several abstract principles of democracy, the picture turned out less clear-cut for Saudi Arabia. That equality before the law was considered vital by only 46 per cent of those OFWs who had been in Saudi Arabia (58 per cent total) is consistent with the less democratic attitudes described above. But this trend changes in several items: The right to criticise the government (freedom of speech) was regarded as vital by 59 per cent of the OFWs who had been to Saudi Arabia (50 per cent total). Freedom of media was regarded as vital by 52 per cent of the total OFWs, but by 59 per cent of Saudi Arabia migrants, while 52 per cent of Saudi Arabia OFWs considered the right to associate to be vital, compared to 42 per cent in general.

Thus, while in the general index of abstract principles of democracy Returnees from Saudi Arabia rank third, they show the clearest support when asked about freedom and protest rights. Since OFWs in Saudi Arabia are especially restricted precisely in respect of these rights, even the respondents critical of democracy as a system may hold them in higher esteem. This is consistent with a slight increase in support for these rights when compared to the First Timers to Saudi Arabia. At the same time, having experienced the positive outcomes of the Saudi regime for its citizens and in view of the fact

Questions covered: the right to vote, equal treatment by courts, freedom of media, freedom of speech, general right to run for office, freedom of association, right to strike and civilian control of the military.
that the First Timers sample indicates below-average support for democracy, the Return Migrants also perceive these aspects of an authoritarian system, like the strict law, as positive.

**Japan: Seeing the Yakuza at Work—but Only a Little Democracy**

Owing to its nature (90 per cent of respondents in the sample are entertainers), deployment of OFWs to Japan has always been especially controversial in the Philippines and subject to constant changes in regulations. This led to very uneven numbers in the time period covered by the survey, ranging from 25,000 to about 80,000 OFWs annually. Many Filipinas who worked as overseas performing artists (OPAs)—the official name of this group of migrants—in Japan faced violations of their fundamental rights, since they were employed illegally in clubs and deprived of compensations and benefits. In particular, the legal distinction that entertainers were ‘guests’ and not ‘workers’ led to unequal treatment. It has been pointed out above that even in democracies there are different kinds of rules applied to residents and migrants, but among the latter there seems to be a hierarchy as well. As a consequence, these women were very vulnerable to abuse and harassment, but few of them complained—and when they did, these complaints were often not formally filed and put on record.57

In 2000, although the Japanese Supreme Court declared that voting rights for foreigners were constitutional, the bill was not passed. Meanwhile, NGOs complained about rising xenophobia, and undocumented migrants were accused by the Japanese police of being organised criminals. Increasingly, migrants were perceived as being the ‘enemies within’, and therefore the movement for more civil rights for foreign residents met politically with little favour.58

Since human trafficking, especially of women, had become worse over the years without any response from the government, several NGOs, lawyers, researchers and journalists drew attention to the issue. When the US State


Department classified both the Philippines and Japan under the ‘Tier 2 watch list’ because of the governments’ failure to effectively address the trafficking problem in their countries, this was seen as a major embarrassment for both states.\(^\text{59}\) This led to tightened rules to issue entertainer visas in March 2005 and a drastic decrease in the number of de facto hostesses entering the country as entertainers.\(^\text{60}\) But these measures did not affect the survey, since they came into place at a time when the respondents of the survey had already returned to the Philippines.

Japanese labour laws allowed documented and undocumented migrant workers to engage in the activities of labour unions. NGOs are also very active; in 1999, the Asian People’s Organisation initiated a campaign to apply for special permissions for residence, while the National Network in Solidarity with Migrant Workers (NNSMW), one of the most important migrants’ networks, organised a protest march against the revision of the Immigration Law and publicly celebrated the Day for the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families.\(^\text{61}\) But judging from the IDIs, OPAs seemed to have had little exposure to this kind of activism.

Migrants to Japan asked in the survey were almost exclusively female. They were also considerably younger than the migrants to the other countries: the average age of Return Migrants was 23 (std. dev. 4.8) when leaving for Japan, and 31 (std. dev. 5.9) for those coming back. Among migrants to Japan, saving money for one’s own business was a more frequent motive (75 per cent) than among the total sample, gaining new experiences a less frequent motive (43 per cent), showing a very rational motivation for migrating, the young age notwithstanding. This goal was realised at least in a small way by 19 per cent of Return Migrants from Japan opening a sari-sari store (a Philippine neighbourhood commodity shop).

The life of entertainers in Japan was dominated by their work in the clubs. This means that on the upside they had the lowest number of working hours, with 5.4 hours per week on average, related to the business hours of the clubs. Unlike the domestic workers who had to be always ‘on call’, practically no Japanese OFW lived in the house of the employer (1 per cent), and almost all OFWs lived in shared accommodations (95 per cent). Therefore it comes as a


\(^{60}\) AMC, Yearbook 2005, p. 171.

surprise that 9 per cent of the migrants in Japan still reported limited freedom of movement; apparently there was some control exercised by the club-owners. Of the respondents, 26 per cent reported having problems in Japan (21 per cent total). The exact nature of the occupation behind the euphemistic term 'overseas performing artist' (OPA) is to some extent treated as a taboo in the Philippines, especially among the families of the OPAs back home. This ambiguity is also prevalent in the IDIs: prostitution and sexual violence are a recurrent theme in the interviews. Respondents defended themselves against the common perception that being *hapayuki*—a moniker used in Tagalog for OPAs in Japan—is synonymous with engaging in prostitution.

Respondents emphasised the cleanliness of Japan and the orderly surroundings. The Japanese were depicted as very disciplined, and their diligence and perseverance was seen as the driving force behind their economic success. They were also seen as law-abiding, disciplined people, and corruption was considered almost non-existent. Still, discrimination seems to be a problem, since the number of respondents who felt *sometimes* discriminated against was higher than average (29 per cent, 23 per cent total), while the number of the ones who felt discriminated against *most of the time/always* is, with 11 per cent, on the same level as the total percentage.

The group of Return Migrants from Japan stood out in a somewhat puzzling way. Almost equally few Return Migrants from Japan (19 per cent) rejected authoritarian rule as from Saudi Arabia (18 per cent ranking high on the index). However, among First Timers, migrants destined for Japan showed by far the highest percentage of respondents rejecting authoritarian rule (40 per cent ranking high on the index), a difference of 21 percentage points. The difference in support for democracy as a political system was less dramatic (16 percentage points difference between First Timers, at 75 per cent, and Return Migrants, at 59 per cent), but pointed in the same direction. As this was not a panel investigation, one should be cautious when interpreting the difference between First Timers and Return Migrants, especially as Return Migrants from Japan did not differ substantially from the whole sample of Return Migrants. Still, these figures could hint at a decline of democratic attitudes after their stay in Japan.

This is corroborated when looking at the importance attributed to democratic principles: Japan had a share of 41 per cent 'democrats', considerably lower than the share of 55 per cent 'democrats' in the return sample as a whole. There is also a dramatic difference when comparing them with the First Timers—among those, 72 per cent supported democratic principles.

One can only speculate as to the reasons for the lesser support of democratic values among Japan Return Migrants. There are hints in the IDIs that migrants
from Japan favoured active and effective leadership in politics; however, this motive was not restricted to IDIs with migrants from Japan. The figures for Japan could also result from the very young age and the specific work environment composition of Japan migrants. One respondent argued that Filipinas were partly responsible themselves for their abuse, since they were not careful enough in choosing their Japanese friends and entered relationships with members of the Japanese mafia. Another respondent even defended the yakuzas and said that one should not condemn the members of the Japanese mafia: there were good and bad people as well and some of the mafiosi were kind and polite. However, others saw the Japanese mafia as a threat which one should try to evade as far as possible. Whatever the assessment, it is apparent that the shady 'parallel world' of the night-clubs was the primary environment the respondents were exposed to—much more than to the actual challenges and opportunities of a working democracy. Although most migrants claimed to have been happy during their time in Japan, the IDIs revealed that the borderline-illegal environment brought with it increased danger for severe abuses, and there were few reports of Japanese institutions or civil society interfering. At the very least, it can be said that the example of Japan clearly demonstrates that a stay in a democratic country will by no means inevitably result in a more positive assessment of democracy. The way—and degree—to which the migrants experience democracy is also pivotal.

**Hong Kong: Strong Support for Democracy in the 'Cradle of Migrant Activism'**

Although the number of new hires and rehires has continued to decline since the end of the 1990s, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region remained the second most popular destination for OFWs and the number one destination for domestic workers from the Philippines. Since the employment of domestic workers allowed Hong Kong’s educated women to participate in professional life after marrying or giving birth, domestic helpers have become nearly indispensable for middle-class families. The majority of domestic workers come with a renewable two-year contract.62

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The popularity of Hong Kong as a destination started to decline somewhat when in 1999 the government decided on several new regulations, especially the 'two-week rule', which forces migrant workers with terminated contracts to return to their home country within two weeks time if they are unable to find a new employer. In the same year, the government reduced the minimum wage for domestic helpers, justified by the economic recession. Two years earlier, street protests and signature campaigns by migrant NGOs had helped to postpone this decision, and two years later a new reduction was discussed but faced fierce protests from migrants’ organisations, leading the government to withdraw its proposal.

These vocal protests are an indicator of the fact that Hong Kong has a long history of migrant NGOs and can perhaps be seen as the 'cradle of OFW activism'.63 The earliest organisation in support of migrant workers was United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-HK), born in 1985 out of political campaigns against forced remittances imposed by former Philippine president Ferdinand E. Marcos. Later, UNIFIL-HK operated as an umbrella organisation for several NGOs working in the field of migrant support. The following years have witnessed a proliferation of migrant NGOs, sometimes competing, sometimes building alliances, and including NGOs of migrants of different nationalities. NGOs have also increasingly collaborated with the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) to start protests and campaigns. When looking at the agency work of these NGOs, it again becomes apparent that their transnational activism and its implication for democratisation cannot be fitted into the clearly divided categories of internal and external factors. Summing up, the organisation of migrants in Hong Kong is much broader and more effective than in other Asian countries. Still, NGOs reported several cases of abuse. Underpayment and excessive agency fees were the most frequent complaints.64

The exceptional position of Hong Kong as an OFW destination manifests itself in many items of the survey pertaining to the migration experience. Hardly surprisingly, migration to Hong Kong is almost exclusively female (95 per cent) and consists of domestic workers (87 per cent)—a particularly bla-

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64 Interviews by the author with 15 migrant NGO representatives in 2007 and 2008.
tant case of deskilling, since 96 per cent of the respondents have at least a high school diploma or higher education. The average migration duration is significantly higher among migrants to Hong Kong (59 months, almost six years) compared with the total sample (average 3.5 years). This could be attributed to Hong Kong being a long-established OFW destination with an especially lively migration culture and a relatively straightforward migration process. The role of NGOs is reflected in the IDIs: OFW organisations were mentioned as providing support and useful information for migrants, especially in cases of maltreatment by employers.

In the above-mentioned assessment of the destinations, Hong Kong received the highest ratings overall. This can be seen as a clear indicator that migrants judge their host countries less by formal aspects like elections—which they are not allowed to participate in anyway—than by outcomes and the provision of rights that relate to their situation, like freedom of movement or the right to go on strike. The distinction made by migrants between the system and the actual freedoms could also explain that while 65 per cent of all Return Migrants chose the statement democracy is always preferable to any kind of government, this number rose to 80 per cent for Hong Kong. It can be argued that the migrants experienced—and considered—Hong Kong as a democracy in the matters that were relevant to them and thus did not back off from democracy as the preferred kind of government.

For Hong Kong, the percentage of First Timers preferring democracy (81) was as high as among Return Migrants. Again, this might indicate a bias, only this time in the reverse direction from Saudi Arabia: migrants with a high preference for democracy chose Hong Kong, knowing that the Special Administrative Region (SAR) lacks a democratic foundation but nevertheless provides opportunities for participation and a comparatively well-developed ‘OFW civil society’. While the Return Migrants from Hong Kong were doubtless aware that the SAR has no democratic voting process like that in the Philippines (which was regarded as highly flawed), they also witnessed other forms of relatively effective participation. The poor handling of the SARS outbreak and controversy over the anti-subversion law, Article 23, led to peaceful mass demonstrations of Hong Kong residents in 2003 (500,000 out of a population of 6.8 million) and resulted in the withdrawal of the bill and ultimately in the resignation of the unpopular chief executive, Tung Chee Hwa. Demonstrations calling for universal suffrage have so far not been very successful but frequently take place in Hong Kong. Perhaps based on this experience, the SAR Return Migrants put above-average importance on the right to vote (81 per cent compared to 75 per cent total) and freedom of speech (58 per cent compared to
52 per cent). It is also worthwhile noting that when being interviewed, several OFW activists proudly claimed that the Filipinas had taught the Hong Kong citizens 'how to demonstrate'—an indicator that the 'demonstration effect of democratic practices' does not have to be a one-way street.

It comes as no further surprise that, on the above-mentioned scale on the rejection of authoritarian rule, among the Return Migrants from Hong Kong there were 34 per cent high-rankers and only 2 per cent low-rankers (compared to 6 and 25 per cent total). Again, in the combined index on democratic principles, Hong Kong had the highest score (63 to 55 per cent total).

Conclusion

The three case studies covered in this article show significant variation—but not, as one might expect, along the lines of their respective political systems. Hong Kong appears to be the most clear-cut case: the pattern of higher agreement to democratic values could be caused by the exposure of migrants to a lively collection of migrant organisations and a high degree of political mobilisation. Hong Kong offers OFWs personal freedom, labour rights and the possibility of political organisation as migrant workers. It can be argued, that the migrants experienced—and considered—Hong Kong as a democracy in the matters that were relevant to them. On the other hand, migrants to Saudi Arabia were confronted with severe restrictions on their personal freedom, which resulted in high esteem for these rights of personal freedom. However, they also witnessed the efficient functioning of the Saudi Arabian state for the Saudi citizens and concluded from this observation that authoritarian systems do have certain advantages.

Judging from the control sample of First Timers, the exceptional figures for Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia might also be partly due to pre-existing differences. It is unlikely that migrants consciously choose their destination country primarily according to democratic criteria, because their main motive is economic (and the IDIs confirm that migrants tend to take the first assignment abroad offered to them). But democratic attitudes could indirectly have an effect on the selection of host countries. Given the bad experiences and the bad reputation of Saudi Arabia, migrants with democratic attitudes might slightly more often refuse an offer to go to Saudi Arabia than respondents who do not care that much about democratic freedoms.

In the case of Japan there are no such indicators of pre-selection—quite the contrary; the survey data indicated a sharp difference in democratic attitudes between First Timers and Returnees. While the very unique circumstances of
the OPAs in Japan and the use of 'statistical twins' instead of a panel survey necessitates cautious statements, the fact that among the young Returnees a considerable support for democratic values seems to have been lost in migration is still an alarming sign.

The discussion of the case studies has brought about several aspects in the nexus of migration and democratisation that deserve further scrutiny—only a few of these could be found in the existing literature discussed in the first part of the article. It has become especially apparent that the overwhelmingly brightly painted picture of 'political remittances' in the migration context and 'diffusion of democracy' in general can have a darker side as well. The findings support Morawska's call to explore both sides of the potential migration-democratisation nexus. There have been indicators that migration can influence the 'diffuse support of democracy', cited as a prerequisite by Easton and Dennis, in both a positive and a negative manner.

But what about the pro-democratic actions going beyond mere attitudes—actions that Welzel and Inglehart see as an important part of 'the role of ordinary people in democratization'? The survey contained several items dealing with participation—from contacting institutions in case of problems to voluntary engagement to political participation. The results indicated that a substantial proportion of migrants were active citizens and tried to solve their problems instead of enduring them. But it is very hard to judge the impact of migration on these activities. In a retrospective question, Return Migrants were asked about their active political participation65 regarding the time before their first departure and regarding the time after their last return. Their responses showed that political activism before and after migration was closely related—respondents who had been active before they left as OFWs were also active after they came back. But for all three destinations covered in this article it can be said that migrants have become somewhat more active after their return when compared with the time before they had first left the country. This is especially obvious in the case of Return Migrants from Saudi Arabia—here the percentage of migrants who had become active one or several times went up from 33 per cent before they left to 42 per cent in the decidedly shorter timespan since they had returned. When looking at the First Timers heading for Saudi Arabia, the numbers are similar to the retrospective question: only 30 per cent had become politically active so far.

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65 Items covered were: attended a political meeting, signed a petition, attended a demonstration, contacted media, ran for public office.
Saudi Arabia also stands out in other regards: While 31 per cent of First Timers had contacted an institution like elected officials or NGOs in case of problems within the last 12 months, 55 per cent of the Return Migrants had done so in the same timespan. In the 12 months before the survey, Return Migrants from Saudi Arabia had also more often been involved in various forms of voluntary work (46 per cent) than First Timers (33 per cent). These differences could corroborate the assessment of Saudi Arabia made above—apparently, after their return the migrants from Saudi Arabia made extensive use of the rights they were deprived of in the destination. But it is not possible to establish if these actions were indeed pro-democratic in nature—or maybe even quite the opposite.

While the findings presented are very case-specific, their clear variation should at the very least have made it clear that migrants are a worthwhile factor to include in the research on external factors of democratisation, diffusion, democratic consolidation and diffuse support for democracies. In migration studies, the second field of research covered, it should have become evident that the political remittances of migrants deserve to be included as part of the 'new development mantra'—be it as a supporting factor or a potential hindrance for democratic development.