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From Dollars to Domination: Shiʿite Political Remittances, Diaspora Capital, and Elite Formation in Lebanon since the 1970s

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Abstract. This article examines how Lebanese Shiʿite emigrants have transformed economic remittances into political influence since the 1970s. Migration is often described as a source of household support or as a developmental lifeline, yet remittances can also operate as political resources that reshape institutions, elites, and sectarian governance. Focusing on the mechanisms through which emigrant wealth was mobilized to finance schools, clinics, religious centers, and reconstruction projects, the study shows how these initiatives sustained local communities while consolidating partisan authority. The trajectories of Musa al-Sadr's Amal Movement and Hizbullah reveal how financial transfers from abroad were converted into social recognition, symbolic prestige, and durable political power. Historical evidence from the 1970s to the present demonstrates that diaspora capital has institutionalized sectarian welfare, enabled elite reproduction, and compensated for weak state provision. While remittances empowered a marginalized community, they also reinforced Lebanon's sectarian political economy. By situating Lebanon within comparative contexts in Latin America and Africa, the article highlights the dual nature of diaspora remittances as engines of empowerment and instruments of inequality, contributing to broader debates on migration, capital conversion, and political authority in weak and divided states.

Keywords: Lebanon; Shiʿite diaspora; political remittances; transnationalism; migration and elites; sectarian politics; diaspora capital

Introduction

Migration is often narrated as an economic lifeline: a source of remittances that sustain households, reduce poverty, and supplement fragile economies in the Global South. Yet such a framing risks overlooking a more profound reality: remittances, especially when mobilized at scale, are not merely private flows of money but forms of political capital.[1] They shape institutions, restructure elites, and redefine authority within migrant-sending societies. The Lebanese Shiʿite community offers a particularly revealing case. Since the 1970s, emigrants—especially in West Africa, the Gulf, and the Americas—have converted their earnings into political remittances, financing schools, clinics, religious centers, and reconstruction projects that transformed a marginalized sect into a powerful political force.[2]

[1] Grabel, Ilene. "Remittances: Political Economy and Developmental Implications." *International Journal of Political Economy* 38, no. 4 (2009): 86–106. https://doi.org/10.2753/IJP0891-1916380405

[2] Labaki, Boutros. "The Role of Transnational Communities in Fostering Development in Countries of Origin: The Case of Lebanon." Paper presented at the UN Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Beirut, 15–17 May 2006.

Such political remittances are not limited to financial transfers but also encompass the circulation of political ideas, loyalties, and practices through transnational networks. [3] These flows actively reproduce or reshape power structures in the homeland, embedding migrants within the political life of their country of origin. The Lebanese diaspora has similarly functioned as a transnational public sphere where cultural, economic, and political engagements intersect, making migration a long-standing and constitutive dimension of Lebanon's modern political order. [4]

This article asks a central question: how have Lebanese Shiʿite emigrants transformed economic remittances into political influence since the 1970s? In addressing this question, it engages with two strands of scholarship. First is Peggy Levitt's concept of *social remittances*, which highlights the transfer of ideas, practices, and identities alongside money.[5] While Levitt and others emphasized the cultural and normative aspects of these flows, less attention has been given to *political remittances*—financial and institutional resources intentionally mobilized to shape homeland politics.[6] Second is Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital conversion, which illuminates how economic capital can be transformed into social recognition, symbolic prestige, and ultimately political authority.[7] These perspectives together provide a framework for analyzing how diaspora wealth was systematically rechanneled into communal institutions and elite consolidation.

The Lebanese Shiʿite case demonstrates that remittances can serve as a form of *diaspora capital*, deliberately routed through sectarian infrastructures that bind welfare to loyalty and reproduce clientelist systems.[8] By examining the trajectories of Musa al-Sadr's Amal Movement and Hizbullah, this study shows how emigrant transfers became the economic foundation of institutional capacity, enabling Shiʿite parties to provide welfare, claim legitimacy, and entrench themselves within Lebanon's sectarian political economy.[9] The contribution here is twofold. Empirically, the article traces four decades of remittance-based institution building, from the early mobilization of emigrant wealth in the 1970s to contemporary practices of digital transfers

[3] Tabar, Paul. "Political Remittances: The Case of Lebanese Expatriates Voting in National Elections." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35, no. 4 (2014): 442–460. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2014.913015.

[4] Tabar, Paul, and Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss. *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.

[5] Levitt, Peggy. "Social Remittances: Migration-Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion." In *The Urban Sociology Reader,* edited by Jan Lin and Christopher Mele, 2nd ed., 334–342. London: Routledge, 2005. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203103333-44

[6] Pérez-Armendáriz, Clarisa, and David Crow. "Do Migrants Remit Democracy? International Migration, Political Beliefs, and Behavior in Mexico." *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 1 (2010): 119–148. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414009331733 ; Koinova, Maria. "Diaspora Mobilisation for Conflict and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Contextual and Comparative Dimensions." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 8 (2018): 1251–1269. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1354152

[7] Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital." In *Readings in Economic Sociology,* edited by Nicole Woolsey Biggart, 280–291. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470755679.ch15

[8] Saksela-Bergholm, Sanna, Mari Toivanen, and Östen Wahlbeck. "Migrant Capital as a Resource for Migrant Communities." *Social Inclusion* 7, no. 4 (2019): 164–170. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v7i4.2658

[9] Ajami, Fouad. *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shiʿa of Lebanon.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986; Cammett, Melani C. *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014. https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801470332 ; Leenders, Reinoud. *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012. https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801465871

and reconstruction. Theoretically, it reframes remittances as *convertible political capital*, demonstrating the mechanisms through which diaspora contributions consolidate elites in weak and divided states.[10] While comparative scholarship often celebrates remittances as vehicles of democratization,[11] the Lebanese experience underscores their ambivalence: they empower marginalized communities but also entrench sectarian divisions and weaken public institutions.[12]

By situating Lebanon within comparative contexts from Latin America and Africa, the article expands the study of migration and politics beyond Euro-American cases. It argues that in settings marked by weak state capacity and identity-based patronage, diaspora capital is rarely neutral—it becomes a decisive resource in shaping political orders.[13]

Theoretical Framework

In migration studies, remittances are usually portrayed as economic resources—lifelines that sustain households and represent one of the most reliable inflows for developing economies. Yet since the late 1990s, scholars have emphasized that migration produces effects beyond the financial. Peggy Levitt's influential notion of *social remittances* underscored that migrants transmit ideas, practices, and social norms alongside money.[14] These flows reshape households and communities, diffusing expectations of gender roles, civic participation, and organizational practices. Later work highlighted the multidirectionality of such exchanges, showing that they circulate not only from host to home but across diasporic networks and even back to receiving states.[15] Building on this insight, scholars have identified a more explicitly political dimension: *political remittances*. These involve the deliberate mobilization of migrant resources—financial, institutional, or ideational—to influence homeland politics.[16] Political remittances can be understood as multidirectional and processual, encompassing the generation, transmission, and impact of migrants' political engagement across transnational spaces. [17] Rather than functioning merely as financial transfers, these exchanges involve the reproduction and transformation of homeland politics through discursive, institutional, and material channels. This understanding aligns with the broader view that the Lebanese diaspora operates as a transnational public sphere in which culture, economics, and politics are mutually constitutive. [18] Long-standing migratory

[10] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital*; Grabel, "Remittances".

[11] Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, "Do Migrants Remit Democracy?"

[12] Hirt, Nicole. "The Eritrean Diaspora and Its Impact on Regime Stability: Responses to UN Sanctions." *African Affairs 114*, no. 454 (2015): 115–135. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adu061 ; Salloukh, Bassel F. "Taif and the Lebanese State: The Political Economy of a Very Sectarian Public Sector." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 25, no. 1 (2019): 43–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2019.1565177

[13] Koinova, "Diaspora Mobilisation"; Fawaz, Mona. "Planning and the Refugee Crisis: Informality as a Framework of Analysis and Reflection." *Planning Theory* 16, no. 1 (2017): 99–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095216647722

[14] Levitt, "Social Remittances"

[15] Levitt, Peggy, and Deepak Lamba-Nieves. "Social Remittances Revisited." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 1 (2011): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2011.521361

[16] Burgess, Katrina. "States or Parties? Emigrant Outreach and Transnational Engagement." *International Political Science Review* 39, no. 3 (2018): 369–383. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512118758154 ; Koinova, "Diaspora Mobilisation".

[17] Tabar, Paul. "Political Remittances".

[18] Tabar, Paul, and Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss. *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora.*

circuits have thus produced forms of social and political remittance that predate contemporary globalization, making Lebanese migration a structural feature of the country's modernity rather than a recent response to crisis.

In some settings, such as Mexico, migrant funding has supported civic associations and opposition parties, thereby widening democratic competition.[19] In others, as in Eritrea, remittances have sustained authoritarian regimes.[20] The Lebanese case illustrates a third possibility: in a sectarian political system, political remittances reinforce communal elites rather than national institutions. This perspective challenges the developmentalist assumption that remittances are inherently democratizing or neutral.[21]

To analyze this process, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital provides a valuable framework. Bourdieu distinguished between economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital and emphasized their convertibility.[22] Wealth acquired abroad can be reinvested in community institutions—schools, clinics, mosques—that generate social recognition and symbolic legitimacy, which in turn yield political authority. Migrants thus operate as political entrepreneurs, strategically converting resources across fields. This dynamic is especially salient in Lebanon, where communal institutions mediate access to welfare and representation.[23]

The concept of *migrant capital* extends Bourdieu's insights to transnational contexts, capturing the accumulation of financial resources, networks, and reputational assets across borders.[24] In Lebanon, Shiʿite emigrants who achieved success in West Africa or the Gulf often reinvested in their home regions, enhancing both prestige and authority.[25]

These acts were not neutral philanthropy but deliberate investments in status and influence. Over time, repeated contributions accumulated into durable structures—welfare offices, religious centers, and political movements—that bound emigrants to homeland parties and reshaped elite trajectories.[26]

By combining political remittances with capital conversion, this framework clarifies the mechanisms by which remittances become political power. It also highlights the importance of institutional context. Where states are strong, remittances may bolster public provision; where states are weak and politics is mediated by identity-based elites, remittances reinforce those elites. Lebanon exemplifies the latter pattern: diaspora resources were systematically routed through sectarian parties, producing empowerment within the community but deepening fragmentation at the national level.[27]

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[19] Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, "Do Migrants Remit Democracy?"
[20] Hirt, "Eritrean Diaspora"
[21] Grabel, "Remittances"; Labaki, "Role of Transnational Communities".
[22] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital.*
[23] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism.*
[24] Saksela-Bergholm et al., "Migrant Capital as a Resource"
[25] Leichtman, Mara A. "The Legacy of Transnational Lives: Beyond the First Generation of Lebanese in Senegal." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005): 663–686. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569320500092794
[26] Ajami, *Vanished Imam*; Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism.*
[27] Salloukh, "Taif and the Lebanese State".

Historical Background

The political emergence of Lebanon's Shiʿites is inseparable from a longer history of marginalization and migration. Until the mid-twentieth century, most Shiʿites lived in the rural South, the Beqaa, and the southern suburbs of Beirut—areas marked by weak infrastructure and limited state investment. The 1943 National Pact entrenched their subordinate position by privileging Maronite and Sunni elites, leaving Shiʿites underrepresented and economically disadvantaged.[28] Out-migration became a central strategy of survival, creating transnational circuits that later became political lifelines.[29]

By the 1950s–1970s, three migration destinations were especially significant. West Africa, where Lebanese traders and entrepreneurs had long been present, provided commercial profits that financed land, education, and conspicuous housing at home. The Gulf oil boom opened new opportunities for professionals and workers, whose remittances underwrote household budgets and communal projects. Smaller flows reached the Americas, often channelled into philanthropic giving and religious ventures.[30] The state largely treated migration as a "safety valve," externalizing socio-economic pressures while neglecting rural development.[31]

These flows gradually altered communal status. Emigrant wealth materialized in new villas and public donations, producing what Bourdieu would call the conversion of economic into symbolic capital.[32] Successful emigrant families became proto-elites, admired and resented in equal measure, whose influence often exceeded that of state officials in peripheral regions.

A decisive moment came with Imam Musa al-Sadr's arrival in 1959. Combining clerical legitimacy with modern political vision, al-Sadr reframed emigrant wealth as a communal trust.[33] Through the Higher Islamic Shiʿite Council (1969), he urged emigrants to pool resources for schools, clinics, and welfare associations.[34] Scattered hometown philanthropy was thus institutionalized, transforming remittances into the infrastructure of collective empowerment.

The outbreak of civil war in 1975 intensified these dynamics. Remittances became indispensable for household survival, while militia politics incentivized their partisan channeling. Amal, founded by al-Sadr and later led by Nabih Berri, relied heavily on diaspora support from West Africa and the Gulf to finance relief, schools, and armed mobilization.[35] Conspicuous "remittance houses" proliferated, both as symbols of diaspora success and as bases of local authority aligned with partisan politics.[36]

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[28] Idem.

[29] Labaki, "Role of Transnational Communities"; Leichtman, "Legacy of Transnational Lives".

[30] Gualtieri, Sarah M. A. *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520943469

[31] Hourani, Guita G., Elie Sensenig-Dabbous, and Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration. *Insecurity, Migration and Return: The Case of Lebanon Following the Summer 2006 War.* Florence: European University Institute, 2007

[32] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital.*

[33] Ajami, *Vanished Imam;* Halawi, Majed, and Robert B. Betts. "[Review of *A Lebanon Defied: Musa al-Sadr and the Shiʿa Community*]." Middle East Policy* 5, no. 4 (1998): 206–208.

[34] Ajami, *Vanished Imam;* Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*.

[35] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*; Leenders, *Spoils of Truce*.

[36] Deeb, Lara. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shiʿi Lebanon.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

By the 1980s, a second vector emerged with Hizbullah's rise. While Iranian backing was foundational, diaspora transfers from the Gulf, West Africa, and the Americas were crucial to building schools, clinics, and reconstruction programs that functioned as a parallel welfare state.[37] In both Amal and Hizbullah, emigrant wealth was systematically converted into social and symbolic capital, which in turn consolidated political authority.[38]

Thus, what began as an economic safety valve became the structural basis for political transformation. Migration produced not only remittances but new elites, institutions, and identities. The Shiʿite case illustrates how diaspora capital, once institutionalized, could reposition a marginalized community at the center of Lebanon's sectarian order.[39]

Amal, Musa al-Sadr, and Diaspora Funding

The transformation of Shiʿite remittances into political influence was crystallized through the leadership of Imam Musa al-Sadr and the institutionalization of the Amal Movement in the 1970s. Al-Sadr, who arrived in Lebanon in 1959 from Qom and Najaf, combined theological authority with a modern political idiom. He reframed emigration not as an escape but as a collective resource: diaspora wealth, he argued, should be invested in communal welfare and political empowerment.[40]

This vision materialized through the Higher Islamic Shiʿite Council (1969), which gave Shiʿites an official institutional voice. Its schools, clinics, and welfare offices were largely financed by emigrants in West Africa and the Gulf.[41] Al-Sadr's innovation lay in channeling dispersed philanthropic giving into coordinated, institutionalized projects. What had been fragmented acts of hometown charity became part of a structured political project of community uplift.[42]

The founding of *Harakat al-Mahrumin* (Movement of the Deprived), later known as Amal, in 1974 marked the political consolidation of these efforts. Amal depended heavily on diaspora networks, especially in West Africa, where traders and entrepreneurs pooled funds for welfare and mobilization.[43] As civil war erupted in 1975, remittances became even more critical. Amal's schools, relief programs, and armed units were sustained by emigrant support, transforming diaspora wealth into the basis of political authority.[44]

The social landscape also bore the imprint of migration. Large villas—popularly known as "remittance houses"—sprouted across the South and the Beqaa. While often critiqued for their aesthetics, they symbolized emigrant success and conveyed prestige.[45] Many of their owners

[37] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism;* Al-Harithy, Howayda, ed. *Urban Recovery: Intersecting Displacement with Post-War Reconstruction.* London: Routledge, 2022. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003091707

[38] Deeb, *Enchanted Modern;* Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism.*

[39] Ajami, *Vanished Imam;* Salloukh, "Taif and the Lebanese State".

[40] Ajami, *Vanished Imam*, 115-20.

[41] Labaki, "Role of Transnational Communities"; Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*, 72-74.

[42] Ajami, *Vanished Imam*, 132-35.

[43] Ajami, *Vanished Imam*, 142-47.

[44] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*, 75-77; Leenders, *Spoils of Truce.*

[45] Deeb, *Enchanted Modern, 55-59;* Fawaz, Mona. "The Politics of Property in Planning: Hezbollah's Reconstruction of Haret Hreik (Beirut, Lebanon) as Case Study." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 3 (2014): 922–934. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468

became notables aligned with Amal, leveraging diaspora resources into local influence. Here, remittances exemplified capital conversion: economic capital was reconfigured into symbolic recognition and then into political standing.[46]

After al-Sadr's disappearance in Libya in 1978, Nabih Berri assumed Amal's leadership. He maintained strong links with emigrant financiers, particularly in West Africa, and institutionalized diaspora funding as a key resource for sustaining welfare programs and militias during the war years.[47] This dynamic reflected a broader logic of Lebanon's sectarian system: elites monopolize external resources—whether aid, patronage, or remittances—to consolidate authority.[48]

Amal's reliance on diaspora capital thus reveals the ambivalence of political remittances. On one hand, they financed services that improved livelihoods and gave Shiʿites a stronger collective voice. On the other, they entrenched sectarian clientelism by binding welfare and protection to partisan loyalty. The case shows how emigrant wealth, once organized through institutions, could serve simultaneously as an instrument of empowerment and as a mechanism of elite reproduction.[49]

Hizbullah, Remittances, and Institutionalization

If Imam Musa al-Sadr and the Amal Movement marked the first politicization of Shiʿite remittances, the rise of Hizbullah in the 1980s brought their full institutionalization. Born out of the Israeli invasion of 1982, inspired by the Iranian revolution, and embedded in Lebanon's sectarian field, Hizbullah's leaders understood from the outset that legitimacy required more than armed resistance. For a historically marginalized community, survival depended on welfare, education, healthcare, and reconstruction. To deliver these goods, the party developed a diversified financial base: steady subsidies from Iran, religious tithes collected through clerical networks, and crucially, diaspora remittances from Shiʿite emigrants across the Gulf, West Africa, Europe, and the Americas.[50] What distinguished Hizbullah was not simply access to money but the organizational form through which resources were captured, moralized, and institutionalized. In Bourdieu's terms, diaspora economic capital was transformed into social and symbolic capital—reciprocity, prestige, and legitimacy—which could then be converted into durable political authority.[51]

Hizbullah's genius lay in routinizing this process, creating a remittance–welfare–authority chain that embedded emigrant wealth into the very fabric of Shiʿite communal life. From the mid-1980s onward, the party cultivated multiple remittance pathways. Emigrants who had long remitted to families were encouraged—through clerical guidance, party-aligned charities, and hometown associations—to allocate a share to institutions linked with Hizbullah's social wing.[52]These funds financed a dense welfare infrastructure: schools, clinics, hospitals, and social assistance programs that, by the 1990s, often outperformed the Lebanese state in efficiency and

[46] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital.*
[47] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism;* Salloukh, "Taif and the Lebanese State".
[48] Salloukh, "Taif and the Lebanese State"; Leenders, *Spoils of Truce.*
[49] Deeb, *Enchanted Modern;* Ajami, *Vanished Imam*.
[50] Norton, Augustus Richard. *Hezbollah: A Short History.* Updated and expanded 3rd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.
[51] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital.*
[52] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism, 84-85;* Deeb, *Enchanted Modern.*

reach.[53] Religious obligation was a key mechanism. Shiʿite jurisprudence requires the payment of *khums* (a one-fifth religious tithe), a portion of which can be directed toward clerically sanctioned projects. Hizbullah-aligned clerics and institutions positioned themselves as legitimate recipients, transforming devotional giving into predictable revenue streams.[54] Because emigrants abroad remained connected to clerical authorities through mosques, religious centers, and visiting scholars, these obligations were globalized, enabling the party to institutionalize diaspora transfers as regular, morally weighted flows.[55] Professional and business networks also became important channels. In the Gulf, Shiʿite professionals and workers remitted portions of their earnings to institutions in their home villages, often under clerical or party guidance. In West Africa, established business communities—especially in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Senegal—provided venues for fundraising campaigns, religious events, and philanthropic projects tied to Hizbullah.[56] Associations in the Americas similarly channeled donations toward schools, clinics, and welfare funds in Lebanon. In each case, what might appear as philanthropy was simultaneously a political act: emigrants tied their giving to communal belonging, partisan loyalty, and ideological affirmation.[57]

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Hizbullah had created a parallel welfare state. Its institutions offered education, health, and social services at lower costs and higher efficiency than public provision.[58] For emigrants, donating to these institutions allowed them to materialize belonging at home, inscribing themselves in the physical and moral fabric of their villages and neighborhoods. For recipients, these services generated deep loyalty and trust. In Bourdieu's language, economic capital was converted into social capital (reciprocity and networks) and symbolic capital (piety, modernity, protection).[59] This in turn consolidated political capital, expressed in votes, mobilization, and legitimacy. One emblematic institution was *Jihad al-Binaa* (literally "the struggle for reconstruction"), Hizbullah's development arm. Established in 1985, it became the channel through which diaspora and external resources were invested in rebuilding homes, roads, and utilities.[60] Such projects were highly visible markers of care and efficiency, contrasting sharply with state neglect. They not only met material needs but also reinforced the moral authority of the party as protector and provider. For emigrants, contributing to these projects allowed them to inscribe themselves in the landscape, financing schools, mosques, and clinics that bore their names or the party's.[61]

The 2006 war provided a striking illustration of this process. Israeli bombardment devastated southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs. Within weeks, Hizbullah—through *Jihad al-Binaa* and allied charities—distributed cash compensation and launched rapid

[53] Leenders, *Spoils of Truce, 117-22.*
[54] Deeb, *Enchanted Modern.*
[55] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism, 93-96;* Leichtman, Mara A. *Shiʿi Cosmopolitanisms in Africa: Lebanese Migration and Religious Conversion in Senegal*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.
[56] Leichtman, *Shiʿi Cosmopolitanisms in Africa*; Labaki, "Role of Transnational Communities".
[57] Deeb, Lara, and Mona Harb. *Leisurely Islam: Negotiating Geography and Morality in Shiʿite South Beirut.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.
[58] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism;* Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History.*
[59] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital;* Deeb*, Enchanted modern.*
[60] Leenders, *Spoils of Truce.*
[61] Al-Harithy, *Urban Recovery.*

repairs. While Iranian funds were substantial, diaspora contributions—channeled through mosque campaigns, hometown committees, and party-aligned NGOs in Europe, North America, and West Africa—bridged gaps and financed local projects.[62] The speed and visibility of reconstruction contrasted with the Lebanese state's sluggish response, reinforcing Hizbullah's legitimacy and underscoring the political potency of diaspora-backed institutional capacity.[63]

Hizbullah's success depended not only on the services it provided but on the symbolic registers attached to diaspora capital. Remittance-funded schools and clinics were framed as embodiments of *pious modernity*—Islamic ethics fused with technocratic efficiency.[64] Diaspora contributions were sacralized through religious discourse, presented not as donations but as obligations to community and faith. In this way, emigrant wealth carried moral weight that stabilized flows and legitimized their political use. The aesthetics of diaspora capital reinforced this dynamic. Emigrant-financed houses, mosques, and community centers were visible markers of success and belonging. Though sometimes critiqued for their ostentation, they signaled prestige and authority.[65] For Hizbullah, such projects functioned as symbolic capital that could be mobilized electorally and organizationally. They materialized the convertibility of money into status and of status into power.[66]

The Lebanese case complicates dominant narratives of political remittances. In Mexico, migrants remitted funds and democratic norms that empowered opposition parties and civic associations.[67] In Eritrea, by contrast, emigrants' contributions sustained an authoritarian regime, embedding them in surveillance and coercion.[68] Hizbullah's model illustrates a third trajectory: diaspora capital empowered a marginalized community but did so by entrenching sectarian patronage rather than cross-sectarian reform. Comparative insights underscore the importance of institutional context. Where states are strong, remittances may bolster public provision; where states are weak and sectarian brokers dominate, remittances reinforce those brokers.[69] Lebanon exemplifies the latter pattern. Hizbullah's capacity to institutionalize diaspora giving allowed it to weather sanctions, wars, and economic collapse. Its remittance ecology became global, extending across religious, business, and philanthropic networks that were difficult to regulate or sanction.[70]

The institutionalization of diaspora remittances through Hizbullah has been both empowering and constraining. On one hand, it allowed Shiʿites—long excluded from state power—to build schools, clinics, and infrastructures that improved material life and conferred dignity. On the other hand, by tying welfare and protection to partisan institutions, it entrenched sectarian dependency and weakened national institutions. As Bassel Salloukh notes, Lebanon's political economy is sustained by the monopolization of external rents by sectarian elites.[71] Remittances fit this logic perfectly: they became external rents captured and institutionalized by

[62] Leenders, *Spoils of Truce;* Fawaz, "Politics of Property".
[63] Fawaz, "Politics of Property".
[64] Deeb*, Enchanted modern, 111-15;* Deeb and Harb, *Leisurely Islam.*
[65] Fawaz, "Politics of Property"; Deeb*, Enchanted modern.*
[66] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital.*
[67] Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, "Do Migrants Remit Democracy?"
[68] Hirt, "Eritrean Diaspora".
[69] Koinova, "Diaspora Mobilisation".
[70] Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, "Social Remittances Revisited".
[71] Salloukh, "Taif and the Lebanese State"

Hizbullah.[72] The broader implication is that diaspora capital, often celebrated as developmental, can serve as a mechanism of elite reproduction. Migrants' intentions—to help families and communities—are refracted through institutional contexts that transform their contributions into political authority.[73] This does not negate the empowerment achieved, but it cautions against uncritical celebrations of remittances as neutral or inherently democratizing.

Hizbullah's rise therefore demonstrates the institutionalization of political remittances at scale. What began as family support evolved into a globalized financial ecology that sustained a parallel welfare state, provided rapid reconstruction, and entrenched partisan authority. Through clerical sanction, organizational discipline, and symbolic labor, emigrants' transfers were converted into political capital with remarkable durability. This trajectory underscores the theoretical contribution of integrating political remittances with capital conversion. It specifies how diaspora capital becomes authority:

- money
- institutions
- loyalty
- legitimacy
- political power.[74]

It also highlights the ambivalence of migration's political effects: empowering the marginalized while hardening sectarian divisions. In weak and divided states, diaspora remittances are rarely neutral—they are constitutive of political orders.[75]

Continuities and New Patterns, 2000s–Present

The early 2000s did not fundamentally alter the dynamic through which Shiʿite emigrants converted economic remittances into political influence. Rather, the logic of capital conversion—remittances into services, services into loyalty, and loyalty into authority—was consolidated and adapted to new conditions of conflict, reconstruction, financial crisis, and digital connectivity. Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 elevated Hizbullah's standing as the uncontested steward of the "resistance," generating new expectations for service delivery and reconstruction. Meeting these expectations required substantial resources. Iranian subsidies remained central, but diaspora remittances from the Gulf, West Africa, and the Americas became indispensable complementary streams that sustained schools, clinics, religious centers, and development initiatives.[76] These flows reinforced Hizbullah's dual identity as both resistance movement and welfare provider and entrenched the systematic conversion of emigrant wealth into political authority.

The July–August 2006 war starkly revealed the political stakes of remittances. Israeli bombardment displaced hundreds of thousands and destroyed housing and infrastructure across the South and the southern suburbs of Beirut. Hizbullah, through *Jihad al-Binaa* and affiliated charities, responded rapidly with cash compensation and visible repairs.[77] While Iranian funds

[72] Leenders, *Spoils of Truce.*
[73] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism;* Deeb*, Enchanted modern.*
[74] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital;* Grabel, "Remittances".
[75] Koinova, "Diaspora Mobilisation".
[76] Leenders, *Spoils of Truce, 117-22;* Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism, 102-107.*
[77] Fawaz, "Politics of Property"; Al-Harithy, *Urban Recovery.*

underwrote major expenditures, diaspora contributions—wired through family channels, hometown committees, mosques, and party-aligned NGOs—bridged gaps and financed local reconstruction. The speed of this diaspora-backed recovery magnified Hizbullah's legitimacy, contrasting sharply with the Lebanese state's slow and fragmented response.[78] Reconstruction thus became a visible medium of capital conversion: emigrant money materialized as rebuilt homes, renewed livelihoods, and enduring political loyalty.

Beyond episodic crises, everyday remittances continued to underpin communal institutions and household survival. Throughout the 2010s, remittances consistently accounted for more than 12 percent of Lebanon's GDP, ranking the country among the most remittance-dependent globally.[79] In Shiʿite-majority regions, these flows sustained schools, clinics, mosques, and welfare offices affiliated with Amal and Hizbullah. By capturing and steering a portion of these resources, sectarian parties maintained their role as indispensable brokers, translating external money into domestic votes and loyalty.[80] This dynamic exemplified sectarian clientelism mediated by external rents: households depended on diaspora remittances, but their access to services was structured by partisan institutions.

Syrian war that began in 2011 introduced both fiscal pressures and reputational costs for Hizbullah, which deployed fighters to support the Assad regime while trying to preserve its welfare commitments at home. Diaspora transfers cushioned these pressures, helping fund assistance to fighters' families and displaced persons.[81] The ability to redeploy emigrant wealth for both conflict-related and social purposes illustrated the flexibility of political remittances, showing how diaspora capital could sustain support even during periods of domestic controversy.

At the same time, new technologies reshaped remittance channels and political communication. Alongside banks and exchange houses, mobile transfers, *hawala* networks, and even cryptocurrency enabled faster and sometimes less regulated flows.[82] These innovations made it easier for emigrants to bypass restrictive banking systems, particularly during crises. Social remittances circulated simultaneously, as diaspora communities engaged via social media, livestreamed sermons, and online fundraising campaigns.[83] The immediacy of these digital interactions reinforced narratives of sacrifice, service, and communal duty, knitting emigrants more tightly into partisan projects at home.

Lebanon's financial collapse after 2019 further magnified the political salience of remittances. As banks froze deposits and the currency collapsed, remittances became among the only stable sources of foreign currency. Families relied on emigrants to keep households afloat, while party-affiliated networks often intermediated flows, tightening partisan control over access to aid.[84] Emigrants increased transfers through informal channels, bypassing the formal banking

[78] Leenders, *Spoils of Truce.*

[79] Ratha, Dilip, Christian Eigen-Zucchi, and Sonia Plaza. *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016.* 3rd ed. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2016. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0319-2

[80] Salloukh, "Taif and the Lebanese State"; Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism, 132-135.*

[81] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism;* Koinova, "Diaspora Mobilisation".

[82] Vari-Lavoisier, Isabelle. "The Economic Side of Social Remittances: How Money and Ideas Circulate Between Paris, Dakar, and New York." *Comparative Migration Studies* 4, no. 1 (2016): 20. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-016-0039-6

[83] Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, "Social Remittances Revisited".

[84] Ratha et al., *Migration and Remittances Factbook.*

sector, which had lost public trust. Hizbullah and Amal were able to convert these inflows into targeted welfare, strengthening their role as indispensable brokers. In this context, the legitimacy of sectarian parties became more closely tied than ever to their capacity to mobilize and channel diaspora wealth.

The 2024–2025 conflict between Lebanon and Israel once again underscored the political centrality of diaspora remittances. The renewed bombardment of southern Lebanon, the Bekaa, and the southern suburbs of Beirut displaced tens of thousands and destroyed large sections of civilian infrastructure. As in 2006, rapid diaspora mobilization through digital fundraising platforms, clerical networks, and local NGOs provided crucial relief and reconstruction funds. Shiʿite emigrants in the Gulf, West Africa, and the Americas organized transnational aid campaigns that financed housing repairs, medical supplies, and emergency welfare for displaced families. These remittance flows not only mitigated humanitarian suffering but also reaffirmed the authority of Hizbullah's welfare institutions, whose capacity to distribute assistance swiftly contrasted with the paralysis of the Lebanese state. The war thus reactivated the established remittance–authority nexus under new technological and geopolitical conditions, demonstrating how diaspora capital remains embedded in Lebanon's cycles of destruction and recovery.

The symbolic dimension of diaspora capital also persisted. Emigrant-funded houses and religious or educational complexes continued to mark rural and urban landscapes, signaling prestige, belonging, and partisan alignment. Their aesthetics remained contested—celebrated by some as resilience, critiqued by others as excess—but their political function was unmistakable.[85] They materialized the conversion of emigrant economic success into symbolic authority that could be leveraged electorally and organizationally.

Taken together, these developments underscore the resilience and adaptability of the remittance–politics nexus. Across war, sanctions, financial collapse, and technological change, emigrant wealth continued to be systematically transformed into political capital. The mechanisms were consistent—family remittances diverted into communal institutions, clerical sanction of religious giving, visible reconstruction projects—but the modalities evolved, incorporating digital technologies and informal transfer systems. The 2024–2025 conflict confirmed the durability of this system: even amid renewed warfare and economic collapse, diaspora capital continued to flow, sustaining partisan infrastructures and reaffirming the link between transnational solidarity and sectarian authority. The effect was to preserve Shiʿite parties' centrality even amid systemic crisis.

Theoretically, this trajectory reinforces a context-contingent view of political remittances. Where states are strong, diaspora transfers may be absorbed into national institutions; where states are weak and sectarian brokers mediate welfare, remittances reinforce those brokers.[86] In Lebanon, emigrants empowered their community but also deepened sectarian segmentation and undermined state authority. The events of 2024–2025 illustrate that this pattern remains unchanged: remittances continue to operate as both instruments of survival and mechanisms of political reproduction. What enabled Amal and Hizbullah to weather sanctions and crises was precisely their capacity to institutionalize diaspora wealth into durable welfare infrastructures and political authority.[87]

[85] Deeb, *Enchanted modern*; Fawaz, "Politics of Property".
[86] Koinova, "Diaspora Mobilisation".
[87] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*; Salloukh, "Taif and the Lebanese State".

Discussion

The trajectory from Shiʿite marginalization to political empowerment in Lebanon demonstrates how diaspora remittances function as political resources through the mechanism of capital conversion. What began as household support gradually became the financial foundation of institutions, movements, and elites. The rise of Musa al-Sadr's Amal in the 1970s, the consolidation of Hizbullah in the 1980s and 1990s, and the resilience of Shiʿite parties through the crises of the 2000s and 2010s all reveal a consistent pattern: emigrants' economic transfers were transformed into social trust, symbolic prestige, and political authority.[88] The most recent conflict of 2024–2025 between Lebanon and Israel has once again confirmed this continuity, as diaspora mobilization and rapid transnational fundraising became central to post-conflict relief and reconstruction, reaffirming the capacity of remittance networks to sustain political authority during periods of acute crisis. The Lebanese case therefore unsettles narrow developmentalist framings of remittances as economic lifelines or poverty-reduction tools. It shows instead that remittances can perform overtly political work, binding welfare to loyalty, shaping elite formation, and redefining communal hierarchies.

In this sense, the Lebanese experience enriches and complicates the literature on migration and remittances. Peggy Levitt's notion of social remittances emphasized the diffusion of ideas, norms, and practices across borders.[89] This perspective highlighted the non-economic dimensions of migration but often assumed that flows of ideas and resources contribute to democratization and civic participation. By contrast, the concept of political remittances clarifies the intentional mobilization of migrant wealth and networks for political projects.[90] Political remittances extend far beyond financial transfers, encompassing the circulation of political ideas, loyalties, and practices through transnational networks.[91] These flows actively reproduce or reshape power structures in the homeland, linking migrants to domestic institutions in enduring ways. The Lebanese diaspora has long operated as a transnational public sphere in which cultural, economic, and political engagements intersect, making migration a structural and continuous component of Lebanon's political life.[92]

In Mexico, for instance, migrant funding has supported opposition parties and civic organizations, thereby widening pluralism.[93] In Eritrea, however, remittances have been monopolized by the ruling regime, sustaining authoritarian control.[94] Lebanon illustrates a third trajectory: diaspora capital empowered a marginalized community but simultaneously entrenched sectarian clientelism and weakened national institutions.[95]

Bourdieu's theory of capital conversion provides the conceptual key to understanding these outcomes. Economic resources accumulated abroad were reinvested in communal institutions such as schools, clinics, and religious centers. These, in turn, generated social capital through reciprocity and networks, symbolic capital through prestige and piety, and eventually

[88] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism,* 76-83*;* Ajami*, vanished imam,* 132-35.
[89] Levitt, "Social Remittances".
[90] Burgess, "States or Parties?"; Koinova, "Diaspora Mobilisation".
[91] Tabar, Paul. "Political Remittances".
[92] Tabar, Paul, and Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss. *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora.*
[93] Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, "Do Migrants Remit Democracy?".
[94] Hirt, "Eritrean Diaspora".
[95] Koinova, "Diaspora Mobilisation" ; Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism.*

political capital through votes, mobilization, and leadership.[96] This process explains the durability of Shiʿite political movements: institutions established with emigrant funding in the 1970s and 1980s continue to anchor loyalty and legitimacy decades later. Welfare infrastructures financed by emigrants became self-reinforcing political structures that outlasted wars, sanctions, and financial collapse.[97]

The Lebanese case also underscores the context-contingent nature of remittance politics. In states with strong institutions, diaspora transfers may bolster public provision or pluralist politics. In weak states with fragmented authority, they are more likely to be captured by sectarian or partisan brokers.[98] The institutional context of Lebanon—marked by sectarian segmentation and state fragility—shaped remittances into communal rather than national resources. This pattern echoes findings from comparative cases, where diaspora mobilization often reproduces rather than transcends homeland cleavages.[99] The contribution here is to specify the mechanism: remittances are not automatically democratizing or authoritarian, but their effects depend on who captures them and how they are institutionalized.

The symbolic politics of remittances further illustrates their ambivalence. Emigrant-financed houses, religious complexes, and philanthropic projects were not only material investments but also visible markers of status, belonging, and political alignment.[100] They signaled prestige for families abroad and legitimacy for parties at home. Hizbullah's welfare institutions, for example, embodied what Lara Deeb has called a form of "pious modernity," fusing Islamic ethics with technocratic efficiency.[101] These symbols reinforced the convertibility of diaspora capital: money became prestige, and prestige became political authority.

Adaptability has been another hallmark of diaspora capital in Lebanon. Emigrants and political parties adjusted to shifting conditions, from wartime reconstruction to digital remittance platforms during the financial collapse of the 2010s.[102] The persistence of the remittance–welfare–authority chain through these shocks underscores its institutionalization. Even as formal banking channels collapsed, emigrants rerouted funds through informal systems and digital transfers, sustaining households and party-linked institutions.[103] The ability of Shiʿite parties to capture and redirect these flows preserved their role as indispensable brokers, deepening their entrenchment in communal life.

These dynamics raise normative questions about the celebrated role of remittances in global development discourse. International organizations often highlight remittances as engines of resilience, foreign exchange, and poverty alleviation.[104] While these claims are partly valid, the Lebanese case shows that remittances can also reinforce inequality and clientelism. Diaspora capital empowered a marginalized community, providing dignity and services where the state

[96] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital.*
[97] Leenders, *Spoils of Truce.*
[98] Salloukh, "Taif and the Lebanese State".
[99] Koinova, "Diaspora Mobilisation".
[100] Leichtman, "Legacy of Transnational Lives".
[101] Deeb, *Enchanted modern*, 111-15.
[102] Vari-Lavoisier, "Economic Side of Social Remittances"; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, "Social Remittances Revisited.
[103] Ratha et al., *Migration and Remittances Factbook,* 141-44.
[104] World Bank data summarized in Ratha et al., *Migration and Remittances Factbook.*

failed. But this empowerment was channeled through sectarian parties that entrenched dependency and fragmented national politics.[105] The duality of empowerment and entrenchment is central: remittances reduce poverty at the household level while simultaneously reproducing systemic inequality at the political level.

The geopolitics of remittances adds yet another layer. Western governments have long scrutinized Hizbullah's global funding networks, alleging illicit financial activities in Latin America and West Africa.[106] Whether or not such allegations are politicized, they point to the deep insertion of diaspora capital into transnational circuits of commerce, philanthropy, and identity. From the perspective of political remittances, the critical point is not the legality of any given stream but the convertibility of diverse streams into durable political power. Hizbullah's resilience in the face of sanctions illustrates the difficulty of disrupting a financial ecology that is both global and community-based.[107] The 2024–2025 conflict further highlighted this point: despite international sanctions and surveillance, diaspora remittances continued to flow through alternative channels, revealing the depth and flexibility of these transnational networks.

In sum, the Lebanese Shiʿite case demonstrates that remittances are deeply political resources. They are not neutral economic flows but forms of capital that, once institutionalized, shape authority and elite formation. The trajectory from Musa al-Sadr to Hizbullah reveals how emigrant wealth was systematically converted into social trust, symbolic prestige, and political authority, enabling a marginalized community to achieve empowerment while simultaneously entrenching sectarianism.[108] Theoretically, this case advances migration studies by integrating political remittances with capital conversion, specifying the mechanisms through which money becomes power.[109] Empirically, it documents the transformation of a community through diaspora capital over five decades. Normatively, it cautions that remittances, though celebrated as developmental, can reproduce structures that sustain fragmentation and clientelism. The latest conflict of 2024–2025 reaffirms these conclusions: even amid renewed war, financial collapse, and state paralysis, diaspora capital continues to function as both a lifeline and a political instrument, ensuring the persistence of Lebanon's sectarian order. In weak and divided states, diaspora remittances are not peripheral—they are constitutive of the political order.

Conclusion

The trajectory of the Lebanese Shiʿite community since the 1970s illustrates how migration and remittances have been central to political transformation. What began as an economic strategy of survival in the face of poverty and marginalization became, over time, the financial foundation for institution building, elite formation, and partisan authority. The cases of Musa al-Sadr's Amal Movement, Hizbullah's welfare complex, and the ongoing reliance on diaspora transfers during Lebanon's financial collapse all demonstrate that remittances are not neutral economic flows. They are political remittances, resources mobilized and institutionalized

[105] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism.*
[106] Levitt, Matthew. *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God.* Updated ed. London: Hurst & Co., 2024.
[107] Leenders, *Spoils of Truce;* Salloukh, "Taif and the Lebanese State".
[108] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism;* Deeb, *Enchanted modern.*
[109] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital;* Grabel, "Remittances".

in ways that directly shape power relations, social hierarchies, and governance.[110] The 2024–2025 conflict between Lebanon and Israel has once again reaffirmed this dynamic: amid destruction and displacement, diaspora contributions flowed rapidly through digital fundraising campaigns, clerical networks, and NGOs, underscoring that emigrant wealth remains an essential pillar of both communal survival and political legitimacy.

The continuity of this process over five decades underscores its structural character. In the 1970s, West African and Gulf emigrants financed the Higher Islamic Shiʿite Council, Amal's schools, and welfare projects.[111] In the 1980s and 1990s, Hizbullah institutionalized diaspora contributions into clinics, reconstruction agencies, and social programs that rivaled state provision.[112] In the aftermath of the 2006 war, emigrants wired funds that enabled swift rebuilding while the state faltered.[113] During the financial collapse of 2019 and after, remittances became one of the few stable sources of foreign currency, sustaining households and communal institutions alike.[114] These continuities reveal that diaspora capital has long served as the backbone of Shiʿite institutional capacity and political resilience.

Adaptability has been equally striking. As conditions shifted—from Israeli invasions to digital connectivity—emigrants and parties innovated new modalities of transfer and mobilization. Clerical sanction globalized religious giving; NGOs and hometown associations professionalized philanthropy; mobile technologies and *hawala* networks bypassed failing banks.[115] Each adaptation preserved the central chain of conversion: money into services, services into loyalty, loyalty into authority. This flexibility explains how Shiʿite parties have weathered wars, sanctions, and financial collapse while retaining community legitimacy.

The Lebanese case also reveals the ambivalence of diaspora capital. On one hand, it enabled a marginalized community to overcome exclusion, building schools, clinics, and welfare programs that improved material life and gave Shiʿites a stronger political voice. On the other hand, because resources flowed through sectarian parties, empowerment came at the price of deepened dependency and fragmentation. Remittances strengthened Amal and Hizbullah but simultaneously weakened the Lebanese state by privatizing welfare and entrenching clientelism.[116] This paradox reflects a broader lesson: remittances can empower communities while constraining prospects for systemic reform.

Comparative insights help situate Lebanon's experience. In Mexico, emigrants remitted funds and democratic norms that expanded pluralism.[117] In Eritrea, contributions sustained authoritarian rule.[118] Lebanon falls between these poles: diaspora wealth enabled upward mobility and resilience but was captured by sectarian institutions. The political consequences of remittances are therefore context-dependent, shaped by state capacity, institutional

[110] Levitt, *Hezbollah: Global Footprint,* 147-61.
[111] Ajami, *Vanished imam*, 132-35.
[112] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism.*
[113] Al-Harithy, *Urban Recovery.*
[114] Ratha et al., *Migration and Remittances Factbook.*
[115] Vari-Lavoisier, "Economic Side of Social Remittances".
[116] Salloukh, "Taif and the Lebanese State".
[117] Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, "Do Migrants Remit Democracy?".
[118] Hirt, "Eritrean Diaspora".

arrangements, and elite strategies. Where state institutions are weak, diaspora capital becomes a resource for identity-based brokers.

Symbolic politics further illuminates this process. Remittance houses, mosques, and philanthropic complexes served not only as material investments but as visible markers of prestige, belonging, and alignment.[119] They exemplify Bourdieu's principle of capital conversion, in which economic capital becomes symbolic recognition and ultimately political authority. Hizbullah's welfare institutions, celebrated for their efficiency and piety, demonstrate how diaspora contributions acquired moral legitimacy that reinforced political claims.[120] These symbols remind us that remittances are not only financial transfers but cultural and political acts that reorder local hierarchies.

Taken together, these dynamics advance theoretical debates on migration and politics. By integrating the concept of political remittances with Bourdieu's framework of capital conversion, the Lebanese case specifies the mechanisms by which diaspora wealth becomes authority.[121] It moves beyond abstract claims about the "effects" of remittances to show concretely how resources are mobilized, sacralized, and institutionalized. The case demonstrates that in weak and divided states, diaspora remittances are not peripheral; they are constitutive of political orders. The renewed cycle of conflict and reconstruction in 2024–2025 further confirms this: diaspora capital continues to function as both a humanitarian lifeline and a political instrument, blurring the boundaries between solidarity and sovereignty.

Normatively, the findings caution against uncritical celebrations of remittances as developmental panaceas. International organizations often highlight their role in poverty reduction and resilience.[122] Yet Lebanon shows that remittances can entrench sectarian elites, privatize welfare, and weaken public institutions. For policymakers, this suggests that the impact of remittances cannot be assessed solely at the household level; attention must also be paid to the political channels through which they flow. For emigrants, the dilemma is acute: their support sustains families and communities but also reinforces structures that limit systemic reform. This tension is unlikely to be resolved, but recognizing it is a necessary step toward more realistic assessments of migration's consequences.

In conclusion, diaspora remittances in Lebanon have been engines of both empowerment and inequality. They lifted a marginalized community to political centrality but did so by entrenching a sectarian system that remains fragile and fragmented. The lesson is not that remittances are inherently democratizing or authoritarian but that their political effects are mediated by institutional context. In Lebanon, they became the foundation of sectarian authority. The experience of 2024–2025 serves as the most recent demonstration of this enduring pattern: even in the midst of renewed warfare and national collapse, transnational networks of remittance and reconstruction continue to define the contours of power. As migration continues and remittances remain vital to Lebanon's survival, this trajectory offers broader insights into how diaspora capital reshapes politics in migrant-sending societies across the Global South.[123]

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[119] Leichtman, "Legacy of Transnational Lives".
[120] Deeb, *Enchanted modern*.
[121] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital.*
[122] Ratha et al., *Migration and Remittances Factbook.*
[123] Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism.*

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