

CONFLICTA SPOTLIGHT

SIMILAR IN FATE, DIFFERENT IN LIFE:

POTENTIAL AND LIMIT OF SOCIO-POLITICAL SOLIDARITY BETWEEN TURKEY-ORIGINATED AND POST-SOVIET MIGRANTS

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Executive Summary

Germany is home to large communities of Turkey-originated and post-Soviet migrants, both of which face unique challenges and opportunities regarding democratic resilience. This policy brief explores possibilities for socio-political solidarity for those groups and offers recommendations to encourage it more broadly towards other migrant minorities.

Situation of ‘Diasporas’: While both groups have a past of opposing autocratic regimes and confronting discrimination as well as one-sided representation in German media, state of solidarity between the group is weak and Turkey-originated and post-Soviet migrant communities demonstrate serious polarization.

Transnational Repression: Meanwhile, Turkey and Russia exert control and influence overseas populations to use them as tools of soft power. These waves of transnational repressions reflecting broader geopolitical tensions are among factors shaping the identities and actions of migrant communities in Germany.

‘Imported’ and Evolving Conflicts: However, the potential conflicts and polarisation that emerge within these communities are not merely imported from their countries of origin but evolve in Germany. Such conflicts are impacted by local and transnational (f)actors, including discrimination and political participation issues.

Potential for Solidarity: Despite the limited cultural exchange and social networks, both communities share experiences of exclusion by the majority in Germany and repression from their countries of origin. Such commonalities suggest a foundation for potential socio-political solidarity as well as resilience across democratic base of both communities.

Germany hosts the largest population of Turkish citizens abroad, a group known for their support for Erdogan (Yener-Roderburg & Yetiş, 2023) which draws significant media attention (Lisovenko, 2023). Beyond that, the polarization within Turkey-originated communities (hereafter Turkish Postmigrants, TPM¹) manifests itself beyond election results such as mobilization, demonstrations, and conflicts (Arslan & Goetz, 2022) that correlates with the state-led ‘new diaspora policy’ (Adamson, 2019). Similarly, there is gro-

wing unrest among the Russian-speaking communities in Germany (hereafter Post-Soviet Migrants, PSM²), the largest in Europe (Tiido, 2019). This situation has been fuelled by dissatisfaction with Putin’s leadership and a rising surge of Euroscepticism, especially in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine (Fürstaneo & Bosen, 2023). The polarization within PSM communities also has the potential to provoke mobilization and conflict, driven by the state-led ‘Russian World’ doctrine (Golova, 2020).

1 Due to its fragmented history, citizenship is not comprehensive enough to cover the diversity of migration flows from Turkey. We use TPM as an inclusive term to cover those who came to Germany and their descendants regardless of whether they hold German citizenship or not (see Bayad, 2021).

2 Due to ethnic, cultural and language diversity among Russian speaking migrants in Germany, we use PSM as an umbrella term to refer to those who came to Germany from the Soviet Union or a country in its political hinterland or were born in Germany to at least one immigrant parent (see, Golova, 2020).

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Despite these polarising political positions within communities (i.e., autocratic vs. democratic sentiments) and their unfair media representation in Germany (i.e., focusing only on autocratic tendencies), both TPM and PSM communities share a long history of opposition to autocratic regimes in their countries of origin. Besides, they have also demonstrated long-lasting resilience in the face of discrimination and exclusion as migrant minorities in Germany. Drawing from the US-based inter-minority solidarity research, this policy brief explores the potential and limitations of solidarity between TPM and PSM communities to link their democratic potentials.

Large Communities, Soft Powers: Transnational Repression in Germany

Both Turkey and Russia exemplify a contemporary political phenomenon known as diaspora governance where states increasingly intervene in the lives of their citizens abroad to align their 'diasporas' with their domestic and international policies (Gamlen et al., 2019).

These interventions can take diverse forms, ranging from cultural maintenance to silencing activism, and even assassination. Scholars such as Dukalskis and others (2022) argue that these phenomena necessitate a new term: transnational repression. It refers to the strategies of governments to control and influence overseas populations. Among the countries practising transnational repression, Turkey and Russia are particularly 'prolific' in Germany (Golova, 2020; Gorokhovskaia & Linzer, 2022).

Their strategies reflect a shift in how both nations conceptualize their identity and nationhood. In Russia, there has been a move away from the multi-ethnic Soviet identity towards a more assimilationist form of Russian nationalism. Contrarily, Turkey has shifted from an assimilationist Turkish nationalism to an Islamist multiculturalist identity, known as Neo-ottomanism (see, Aktürk, 2017; Kaya, 2019).

Despite these different orientations, both countries instrumentalize their 'diasporas' as soft power tools in neighbouring and overseas countries, using them to extend their influence and assert

their policies on the global stage. Germany holds a special position for both Turkey and Russia, largely due to their complex 'love-hate relationship' with the 'West' (Barr & Feklyunina, 2015).

Both countries depict Germany as embodying Western values that are in opposition to their own. By doing so, they frame their diasporas in Germany as communities that need 'protection', thereby creating a transnational space where they can exert control and maintain loyalty (Golova, 2020; Öktem, 2017).

Old Stories, New Settings: Exported or Imported Conflict?

Although diaspora governance is gaining global attention (Gamlen et al., 2019), the phenomenon is not new, particularly for migration countries like Germany. Since the 1990s, researchers have problematized how cultural ties and proximity to the country of origin can hinder the integration of migrants (see, Heitmeyer, 1996). It was during this period that the interactions within migrant minorities became a focal point of scientific research, primarily under the concept of 'Imported Conflict'. This concept suggests that conflicts within migrant communities can slow down their integration process (see, Brieden, 1996). Factors influencing such conflicts have been categorized into exogenous factors, those rooted in the country of origin such as ethnic and political tensions, and endogenous factors, those that arise within the country of settlement such as experiences of discrimination and a lack of political participation. Hanrath (2012) emphasizes the interplay between these factors in fuelling conflicts within migrant communities.

Later, sociological research has also taken an emic approach to examine such diasporic conflicts from within, such as Turkish ultranationalism in Germany (Arslan, 2009) and the Kurdish struggle in London (Demir, 2015). These studies reveal that issues 'transferred from the homeland', in fact, evolve within the transnational settings, creating dynamics that are not mere replications of the original conflicts (Bozay, 2016) but rather it is reshaping conflicts uniquely. Likewise, more recent

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accounts underscore the ‘exoticization’ of diasporic conflicts. For example, Biskamp (2018) states that Turkish ultranationalism is often depicted as ‘foreign’ in German media, despite sharing many characteristics with classical right-wing extremism (see, Arslan & Goetz, 2022). This portrayal can obscure the understanding of such conflicts and their implications for Germany. Rather than considering these conflicts as ‘transported’ from one context to another, Rönig (2019) suggests a new approach that recognizes the conflicts as evolving in the new environments, influenced by both local and transnational (f)actors (see, Baser, 2015).

The transnationalization of conflict does not occur in isolation, nor is it restricted to a specific migrant group or sending state. The spread of domestic policies worldwide, facilitated by globalization, was initially seen as an instrument to improve democratization and cultural exchange (Koslowski, 2005). Host countries like Germany were expected to increase their ‘absorptive capacity’ through extended citizenship rights and political participation opportunities (Ögelman, 2005). Similarly, Turkey was anticipated to benefit from the European economy and democratic values (Kaya & Kentel, 2004). The ‘Russian diaspora’ was also expected to help Russia in navigating its post-Soviet identity crisis (Saunders, 2005). However, the subsequent decade and the economic crises of 2008 revealed the shortcomings of these expectations. Besides, globalization not only facilitates the free flow of ideas and resources but also contributes to the deterritorialization³ of conflicts (Féron & Voytiv, 2021). Thereby, the conflict within a ‘diaspora’ is not always influenced by only the sending states, but rather it is a struggle among various actors including receiving states, migrant and autochthonous communities, as well as other minorities (Demmer, 2002).

Our Approach: Preliminary Investigation

Above mentioned developments regarding appropriation of diasporic conflict, instead of its exoticization, is relatively new for Europe, meanwhile it is a

well-known phenomenon in traditionally multicultural societies like the USA and Australia. And unlike the European countries where the direct involvement of countries of origin is rarely the case, the USA and Australia experience intra- and inter-minority conflict either. However, the outcomes for both contexts remain similar: tensions and conflicts among different communities. And so far, various mechanisms have been advanced to manage such conflicts.

One promising approach is community resilience, as developed by Michael Ungar’s (2008) extensive work. Ungar’s research indicates that fostering resilience across a community can help prevent violent extremism and isolation.

A review of 25 applied programs shows that increasing meaningful social interactions across communities is enhancing community resilience and social cohesion (Grossman et al., 2016). To achieve this, it is essential to promote peaceful civic participation, contestation and dissent, which can enhance individuals’ sense of efficacy, voice, and control. Another useful approach is building bridges across communities through socio-political solidarity. Derived from social identity theory, Craig and Richeson (2011) demonstrate that enhancing the perception of a common fate among minorities can foster a ‘coalitional mindset’. This mindset encourages different minority groups to unite against common threats such as discrimination and stigma. Besides, such a sense of commonality can lead to political solidarity (Glasford & Calcagno, 2012). Promoting critical consciousness is vital in this regard, as it increases the perception of similarity and decreases competition between groups, ultimately fostering inter-minority solidarity (Burson & Godfrey, 2019).

However, in Europe and particularly in Germany, the issues of inter-minority solidarity and community resilience have been largely neglected by researchers and politicians, despite significant numbers of migrant minorities and tensions emerged within and between these communities. Among all, TPM and PSM are the most prominent due to

³ This term refers to an expansion of conflict over spaces via social and virtual networks that give an autonomous character to contemporary diasporic conflict.

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contemporary polarization within these communities. Both groups, however, maintain the potential for critical consciousness, given the important number of dissidents expelled from their countries of origin due to ethno-cultural tensions or their political opinions who have been settled in Germany (see, Kaya, 2019; Tiido, 2019). Additionally, albeit at varying levels, both groups face exclusion and discrimination which can act as a ‚common fate‘ in their everyday lives in Germany (Hansen & Olsen, 2023).

Based on these observations, we initiated an exploratory research to examine the potential and the limits for socio-political solidarity between democratic base of TPM and PSM in Germany. Such preliminary research is essential to assess the field and the scope of phenomenon before committing more resources, as both groups display considerable diversity in ethnocultural backgrounds, migration histories, and political orientations. As such, we chose to focus on experts from both groups who are well-versed in their communities‘ everyday life and political cultures instead of attempting to fully comprehend and represent the entire community. And drawing from the summarized literature, we designed a semi-structured questionnaire to guide our research. The questionnaire covers three main topics: (1) recognition of diasporic conflict and polarization (e.g., Do you observe intra-group conflict/polarization within your community? If so, how does this conflict manifest itself?), (2) perception of commonality (e.g., Do you think such conflicts are unique to your community? Can you recall any other group/minority with a similar fate in Germany?), and (3) comprehension of solidarity (e.g., How does solidarity develop between groups affected by oppression, discrimination, or racism? What do you think about the possibility of solidarity between TPM and PSM in Germany?).

How do experts assess inter-minority solidarity?

We identified more than 15 potential candidates as ‘experts’ from the relevant literature and our personal and professional networks who come from civil society, politics or academia. We then reached out to experts to invite them for interviews,

aiming to gather diverse and nuanced insights.

Out of 15, we conducted a total of six in-depth interviews between January and April 2024. Selected experts and their insights offer valuable perspectives on the issues of polarization, mobilization, and potential for solidarity within their respective communities (see, Table 1).

The interviews were conducted in various locations convenient for the experts, ensuring their comfort and openness during discussions. Importantly, the experts we interviewed are based in administrative districts where our target populations are most concentrated, such as Detmold, known for its PSM community, and Düsseldorf, known for its TPM community. This geographic relevance ensures that our findings are applicable to the regions where these communities live and interact with each other.

The List of Interviewed Experts:

Expert	City	Affiliation
1	Bielefeld	Modellierton e.V.
2	Essen	Informationsstelle Antikurdischer Rassismus
3	Bielefeld	Runde Tisch für Brackwede
4	Detmold	Freundschaft Druschba e.V.
5	Duisburg	die solidarische Gesellschaft der Vielen e.V.
6	Bielefeld	Föderation demokratischer Arbeitervereine e.V.

Recognition of Conflict & Polarization

While one expert noted a lack of significant conflict within PSM community regarding the invasion of Ukraine and acknowledging an absence of active discussion, many experts agreed that polarization and potential conflict are increasing within their communities. This aligns with the expectations from diaspora governance literature. Nevertheless, several experts indicated that contemporary diasporic conflicts are not particularly alarming or markedly different from those that have been observed for a long time.

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However, some admitted that the „good old days“ of togetherness among migrants, stemming from a shared experience of being foreigners (Ausländer), are gone.

Interestingly, one expert mentioned that new waves of migration bring with them contemporary issues of country of origin into ‘established’ migrant communities and disrupting their social harmony here. Another one highlighted a novelty of the current tensions and their escalation across communities through change in the nature of social interaction due to communication technology and spatial disconnection in Germany:

„...Virtual tension [might] become easily realistic here, because we live remotely in Germany and there is no [practical] reason to come together anymore... the fabric of social interaction has changed in a direction that pushes [our] community work and solidarity into a fragile state...“ (C1/6).

Perception of Commonality

Most experts responded negatively when asked about commonality between the TPM and PSM communities in Germany. While some recognized similarities in power aspirations and strong leadership cults within both groups, they could not provide practical examples or observations of socio-political solidarity in their everyday lives.

Some experts did, however, offer insights into the lack of contact and exchange between the groups. For instance, one expert pointed out that the culture of engagement and politicisation differs significantly between them.

According to him while TPM tend to organize through associations and public demonstrations, PSM remain invisible in the public space and organise individually. This might be due to different opportunity structures regarding political engagement provided to those communities. For instance, Martiniello (2004) make a distinction between state- and non-state politics for migrants political participation and TPM is characterised with non-state politics in Germany while PSM community might have a better access to state-politics (see, Demir et al., 2023).

On the other hand, other experts highlighted the role of religion or regional backgrounds in everyday life that acts as umbrella categories for different migrant minorities:

„Religion or region like [being] Eastern, African, Southern or Muslim acts as a practical categorization system for migrants to relate and exchange through holidays, celebrations, gatherings, etc.“ (C2/3).

Comprehension of Solidarity

Experts draw a complex picture when it comes to solidarity across communities. Many believe that distinct migrant minorities face different problems, which naturally separate them from each other and sometimes even create competition and tension. In line with inter-minority solidarity literature, discriminatory attitudes between migrant communities admitted by the experts as a hindering factor for socio-political solidarity.

However, when it comes to TPM and PSM, there seems to be a neutral or grey area. Some experts reported that with appropriate contexts, such as festivals or community cooperation, these groups can coexist amicably. Another potential ‘unifier’ for these communities could be racism in Germany, such as the rise of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), though this remains a hypothetical situation rather than an actual occurrence.

Despite such challenges, some experts acknowledged the significant potential for socio-political solidarity, given the critical awareness of racism and autocracy among dissidents from both communities. Yet, some experts are also cautious about isolation through case-specific discrimination or subjective perceptions of exclusion in Germany that could be exploited by autocrats of their countries of origin.

„... Political education is needed; resources and privileges must be shared. Alternative structures and educational justice are needed in which children and young people are supported. This work should not be left to right-wing nationalist structures... „ (C3/5).

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Recommendations

Recognise and Address Diasporic Conflicts

Because of their transnational nature, diasporic conflicts are not only ‚imported‘ events impacted solely by countries of origin; they are also inherent to Germany. As dangers to democracy, it is critical to openly confront right-wing, radical, and fundamentalist attitudes and viewpoints among migrant communities. By recognizing these internal dynamics, Germany can better manage and mitigate diasporic conflicts before they escalate.

Promote Diversity in Everyday Life

Although TPM and PSM have a great deal of potential for resilience and socio-political solidarity against racism and authoritarianism, their social interactions are often concentrated in closed regional and religious categorisations, which can result in social and cultural isolation. Increasing the formats and quantity of events and occasions open to cultural and religious diversity is vital to develop exchange opportunities for socio-political solidarity. These exchanges might promote understanding and decrease isolation in favor of democratic values and sentiments.

Focus on Regional and Ethno-Cultural Commonalities

While there isn't any specific conflict between the TPM and PSM communities, our observations indicate that there aren't strong social or cultural linkages either. As a result, finding and focusing on groups that have greater similarities may increase the likelihood of socio-political solidarity. Future research should explore these connections to activate and support inter-minority solidarity, leveraging shared experiences and backgrounds to create more resilient communities.

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