

# Why Do States Develop Multi-tier Emigrant Policies? Evidence from Egypt

Gerasimos Tsourapas 

*Why do states vary their policies towards their citizens abroad, and why are some emigrant groups treated preferentially to others? The literature on the politics of international migration has yet to explore this as a separate field of inquiry, assuming that states adopt a single policy that encourages, sustains or prevents emigration abroad. Yet, in the case of Egypt, the state developed a multi-tiered policy that distinctly favoured specific communities abroad over others. I hypothesise that policy differentiation is based upon the perceived utility of the emigrant group remaining abroad versus the utility of its return. This utility is determined by two factors: the sending state's domestic political economy priorities and its foreign policy objectives.*

*Keywords: Emigration; Diaspora Policy; Egyptian Migrants; Middle East; Sending State*

## Introduction

What accounts for variation in a state's policies towards its citizens abroad, and why are some groups treated preferentially to others? The emerging academic literature on the politics of international migration has yet to explore this phenomenon as a separate field of inquiry and generally assumes that states adopt a single policy that encourages, sustains or prevents emigration. Yet, in the case of Egypt, the state developed a multi-tiered policy that distinctly favoured specific emigrant communities over others. This goes against existing theorisation of how states relate to their emigrant populations in two ways. First, many scholars suggest that states develop homogenous, one-tier policies aiming to encourage or to prevent emigration abroad. However, through the Egyptian case, I demonstrate that states do not assume that all citizens who migrate are equally important. So why should we expect them to develop a single, all-encompassing policy? Second, the limited research on the rationale behind differential state policies towards emigrants has yet to properly theorise the importance of emigrants' potential return to the homeland as a factor in determining

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state engagement policy. Yet, the reasons behind state encouragement of citizens' emigration cannot be disassociated from the reasons behind state discouragement of their potential return to the homeland and vice versa.

In this article, I explore state policy variation empirically in the case of Egypt to shed light on states' motivations in connecting to their emigrant populations residing in different countries. I argue that states frequently develop multi-tiered policies that favour specific emigrant communities over others, depending on these communities' perceived utility abroad *versus* back home. I combine emigration and return migration policies into the term 'emigrant policies' and argue that sending states differentiate their emigrant policies towards emigrant communities based upon the perceived utility of a community remaining abroad *versus* the utility of its potential return. If the perceived utility of a population group abroad is positive, the sending state is more likely to minimise its policy towards the group so as to avoid antagonising the host state, to discourage return migration and to maximise the time its emigrant group spends abroad. In contrast, if a group's perceived utility abroad is negative, the sending state creates a policy that actively aims to foster ties with the group, to encourage its return and to minimise its time abroad. This utility is determined by two factors: first, the sending state's domestic political economy priorities and, second, its foreign policy objectives.

This article focuses on Egypt for two reasons: first, Egypt constitutes the largest supplier of migrant labour in the Middle East. It boasts one of the largest emigrant populations in the world, estimated at 3.7 million in 2010 not including emigrants' descendants. Second, Egyptian emigrant populations are widely dispersed across the world and, importantly, Egypt exhibits wide variation in its treatment of emigrant groups depending on their host country. This allows for a more accurate analysis of within-state variation in policies towards emigrant groups located in different host countries. Other sending states, such as Morocco or Mexico, enjoy larger numbers of emigrant populations but they lack the geographical dispersal that occurs in the Egyptian case. Moroccan emigrants are predominantly found in France, while Mexicans abroad are located predominantly in North America. Thus, they lack any substantial degree of engagement policy differentiation according to emigrants' host country.

During the 1970–2011 period, two sets of policies evolved towards Egyptian communities abroad.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, policy towards Egyptians in Europe, North America and Australia was marked by diverse, institutionalised linkages with emigrant communities, and was particularly inclusive: a variety of legal provisions, annual conferences, complimentary trips to Egypt and a multitude of targeted material issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs aimed to strengthen these emigrant groups' ties to the homeland. On the other hand, state policy towards Egyptians in the Arab world was minimal and reactive. State mechanisms aiming to address various issues evolved reluctantly, if at all; emigrants' human rights were not adequately protected, while ad hoc institutions arose out of the informal sector to fill the void left by government neglect of the intra-Arab emigration process.

I employ the single-case study of Egypt for two reasons. First, a single-case study can provide a challenge to existing theoretical paradigms, paving the way for future large-N studies. In this case, I argue that states develop multi-tier, rather than single-tier, policies towards their emigrant groups that take into consideration both the utility of the group abroad and the utility of its potential return to the homeland. The case of Egypt also poses a challenge to conventional wisdom by indicating a counterintuitive phenomenon: if an emigrant group is useful for a state abroad, the sending state is less likely to invest in an extensive policy towards that group. Contrary to the majority of relevant research, which argues that states engage diaspora and emigrant groups abroad aiming to extract specific benefits from them, I utilise the Egyptian case to highlight how a sending state is more likely to develop an extensive engagement policy towards a group only when the latter stops serving state interests abroad. The Egyptian state, thus, courted emigrants in North America and Europe despite their political opposition to the ruling regime, rather than treating them as state 'traitors' as the literature would have us expect.

Second, the single-case study format allows the introduction of detailed information about the Egyptian case. In detailing how domestic political economy considerations and foreign policy objectives shaped the Egyptian regime's policies, I seek to provide a fresh outlook into how Egypt's position and perceived role in the broader Middle East region is intrinsically tied to its ability to produce vast quantities of emigrant labour. Thus, I aim to provide a more accurate account of the power balances that shape intra-state relations across the Arab world. At the same time, I show how Egypt's post-1970 re-orientation towards the west created new, distinct tensions within the ruling Egyptian regime and drew criticism for the loss of skilled labour to Europe, Australia and North America. Beyond the importance of the Egyptian case, I aim to make a broader argument that is of relevance for comparative politics scholars of migration, detailing how states are able to control population movements in their pursuit of domestic political economy and foreign policy goals.

I employ process-tracing methodology, where qualitative and quantitative data are examined sequentially to draw descriptive inference and to disconfirm rival explanations. I draw upon diverse primary and secondary material in Arabic, French and English for the purpose of hypothesis formation through induction. Primary materials are comprised of semi-structured expert and elite interviews conducted in Cairo ( $n = 31$ ), including current and former ministers, former Prime Minister Abdel Aziz Hegazy and high-ranking government officials. I also draw upon emigration-related articles published in the three major, semi-governmental daily newspapers in Egypt (*al-Ahram*, *al-Akhbar*, *al-Jumhuriya*). Finally, I rely on archival material in Cairo drawn from the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Manpower and Migration, and in London drawn from The National Archives.

### **Studying States' Emigrant Policies**

This section details how the now substantial literature on states' relations to their emigrant groups has yet to fully explore differential states' policies as a separate object of inquiry, and how we can draw from this literature in exploring and theorising the rationale behind such variation. I initially sketch the development of the literature's two broad phases, and I highlight how later researchers have identified both political economy objectives and foreign policy priorities in understanding the rationale behind states' overall involvement with emigrant groups. I proceed to underline the need to analytically disaggregate a state's diaspora policies from those policies targeting citizens who have emigrated or wish to do so. The latter is typically approached as part of a state's 'emigration policy', implying that research glosses over the importance of emigrants' potential return in shaping state rationale. Thus, I propose the term 'emigrant policy' as a more accurate description of state actions towards its external populations. I conclude by proposing a theorisation of states' differential treatment of emigrant groups that builds on the two dimensions already developed in the literature (their domestic political economy and foreign policy utility) but ascribes equal importance to both groups' emigration and their potential return.

The literature on the political importance of emigrant and diaspora groups has undergone two broad phases, yet research has yet to sufficiently theorise why a state would choose to differentiate its policy towards its emigrant populations. The literature's first phase suffered from a tendency to marginalise the role of the sending state altogether. During the 1990s, early academic work on diaspora communities provided a flexible framework through which scholars in sociology, political geography and international relations studies debated post-national belonging (Ragazzi 2014). This literature's aim of exploring processes of emancipation from the nation state implied that the latter, now 'deterritorialised' (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1995), would take a secondary role in such analyses. Researchers focused on transnational communities (Schiller et al. 1995), public spheres (Bauböck 1994) and novel processes of mobilisation (Ong 1996), which were perceived to 'unbind' the nation state from territory. Thus, this early literature paid little attention to the state. Weiner's (1992) work, which argued for a focus on the role of governments in migration through a 'security/stability framework', is a notable exception, even though his attention centred on host states rather than sending ones. Overall, however, this period's perception of emigration was as a challenge to the primacy of the state.

By the early 2000s, it had become clear that the nation state and ethnic politics was still present in the strategies of many emigrant and diaspora groups (Adamson and Demetriou 2007), as groups abroad were correctly acknowledged as serving a 'counterweight to the transnational perspective of migration', for they offered a 'greater focus on the role of the state as an agent' (Lafleur 2013, 9). This second wave of research began to challenge the view that such population movements implied the retreat of the state, mainly highlighting the developmental impact of such movements

for the sending state. Discrediting earlier 'brain drain' criticisms, exemplified in the research of Bhagwati and others, such research was buttressed by growing governmental and NGO attempts at incorporating emigrants into broader developmental policies. A sizeable international political economy literature has since indicated the importance of economic remittances for the sending state (indicatively: De Haas 2005), while a smaller research agenda highlights the foreign policy importance of emigrant and diaspora groups (Délano 2011).

Two limitations of the second phase on state–diaspora relations literature are pertinent here: first, the question of how and why states target different external populations has not been sufficiently problematised. This is not to say that researchers have disregarded differentiated state policies (see, for instance, Naujoks (2013) work on India, Green and Weil's (2007) anthology on emigration policies, or Nyiri's (2013) work on China), but that they have yet to theorise their political rationale and purposes. Schmitter Heisler's (1985) work on sending state policies, for instance, acknowledges that states differentiate between 'long-term-temporary', 'short-term-temporary' and 'permanent' migration but employs this to argue that a state 'benefits [from migration] only if emigrants remain abroad for an extended period without settling permanently' (475). Levitt and de la Dehesa (2003) provide an extensive analysis of sending states' various engagement policies but do not account for within-state variation, an argument that can be made with regard to Collyer's (2013) edited volume on the subject. Koinova's (2015) work on diaspora 'positionality' and Gamlen's (2014) research on 'tapping,' 'embracing' and 'governing' further enhance understanding of sending states' strategies, yet without explicitly theorising on the rationale behind multiple engagement policies. Finally, for scholars of economic remittances, states arguably have more incentives to reach out to wealthier emigrant communities who can act as 'agents of development' (Eckstein and Najam 2013, 17), but such an argument would overstate states' economic calculations at the expense of political ones in promoting population movements (on this, see Greenhill 2011), while also understating the importance of south-south migration.

Second, this research has yet to effectively disaggregate the different types of emigrants that state policies target. Within the emerging literature in political science, in particular, the term diaspora suffers from a significant degree of conflation—often encompassing not merely a state's citizens who have emigrated, but also these emigrants' descendants, as well as other co-ethnics (cf. Brubaker 2005). Such approaches prevent the proper classification and theorisation of state rationale behind engagement policies, particularly when states target different groups in a different manner. Gamlen's (2008) study of the 'emigration state', for instance, equates diasporas with 'extra-territorial populations', including:

temporary or transnational migrants who spread their time between their sending state and elsewhere and fall more or less arbitrarily into one or other policy category of the origin state. They also include longer-term but still first-generation emigrants settled in another country, and descendants of emigrants who—in certain places at certain times—

identify as diasporic or even as members of a fully fledged diaspora 'community' (842–843).

Over the past few years, a growing literature successfully has eschewed such problems of conflation by explicitly centring on state's emigration, rather than diaspora, policies. By avoiding discussion of state co-ethnics, this literature focuses exclusively on state policies towards those who have emigrated with the intention of living abroad, and the reasons behind state engagement with emigrants correspond to the findings of the state–diaspora relations literature, traditionally viewing 'emigrants as a resource that can be mobilised in support of the political or economic interests of the sending state' (Collyer 2013, 5; cf. Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). However, while differentiating between state's emigration and diaspora policies, this strand of literature does not take into account the importance of emigrants' potential return as a shaping factor of state policy. As states frequently develop new institutional mechanisms that target emigrant populations (Brand 2006), they build ties not solely with emigrants, but also with prospective emigrants (Rodriguez and Schwenken 2013) as well as with return migrants (Tsuda 2009; Fitzgerald 2014). This points to an important, albeit un-problematised, aspect of states' policies towards its emigrants, namely the interconnectedness of emigration and return. 'Return movements across time and space have largely been ignored in anthropology and migration research', Stefansson (2004, 3) argued. While sociologists and historians have amended this gap (Levitt 1998; Khater 2001), Stefansson's argument remains true within political science. The literature on diaspora acknowledges that diaspora policies often aim to attract groups of co-ethnics back to the homeland, but the literature on emigration policy has not taken that into account. Put differently, a state's policy of encouraging or discouraging its citizens' emigration is connected to its respective discouragement, or encouragement, of its citizens' return migration.

In sum, I draw upon existing literature in two ways. First, I rely upon state–diaspora relations research to explain how states connect to their populations abroad in a broadly instrumental fashion, aiming to attain distinct political economy and foreign policy goals. Yet, I differentiate between state policies towards diaspora groups in general, and policies towards emigrant groups, on which I focus in this article. Second, I rely on the growing literature on states' emigration policy but I aim to combine both emigration and return migration policy into a state's 'emigrant policy', utilising research in sociology and history that sees the interconnectedness between migration and return. Thus, in my theorisation, a state's emigrant policy encompasses both its emigration and return migration policy but is altogether different from its diaspora policy in two ways: it does not target all co-ethnics, rather state citizens who have emigrated, and it aims at distinct domestic political economy and foreign policy goals.

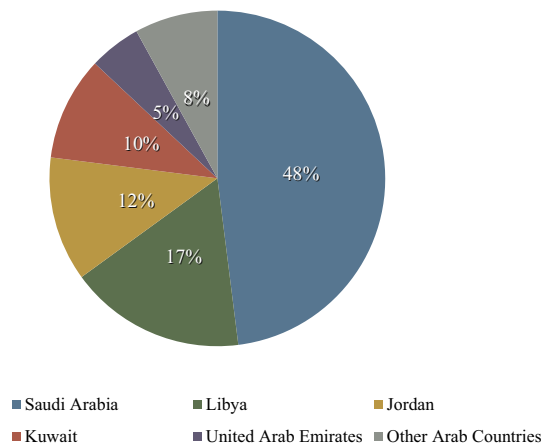
I hypothesise that the degree of a state's engagement with an emigrant community depends primarily upon the perceived utility of the community remaining abroad versus the utility of a potential return. In other words, if the perceived utility of a

population group abroad is positive (i.e. greater abroad than back home), the sending state is more likely to minimise its engagement policies towards that group. In contrast, if a group's perceived utility abroad is negative (i.e. greater back home than abroad), the sending state would create a policy that actively aims to foster ties and encourage the group's return. This utility is determined by two broad factors: first, the sending state's domestic political economy priorities and, second, its foreign policy objectives.

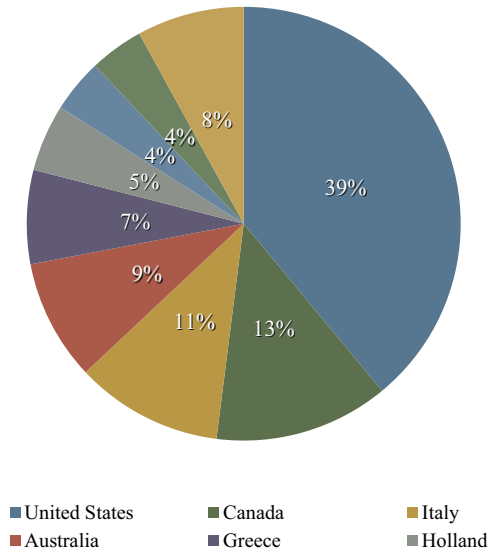
### Egypt's Differentiated Emigrant Policies

In this section, I identify the two sets of emigrant policies developed by the Egyptian state, I evaluate the two existing hypotheses that have been put forth to account for this policy differentiation and propose an alternative one. Already in its first attempt at institutionalising such a policy, in 1971, the Egyptian state made the legal distinction between 'permanent' and 'temporary' emigration. Article 52 of the 1971 Permanent Constitution listed 'permanent' and 'temporary' emigration as an Egyptian citizen's right. Law 111/1983, still valid today, explains the difference between the two: a 'permanent' emigrant is one who 'stays abroad permanently by obtaining the nationality of a foreign country and/or a permanent residence permit; stays abroad for a period of at least ten years; or obtains an immigration permit from one of the countries of destination'. A 'temporary' emigrant, on the other hand, is 'someone (not a student or seconded worker) who works abroad for twelve consecutive months'. For their statistical distribution, see [Figures 1 and 2](#).

However, in practice, this differentiation has been based upon country of destination: Egyptians living in Arab countries are invariably considered temporary emigrants, even when they have lived there for decades. All those emigrating elsewhere, on the other hand, are considered permanent emigrants, even if they just arrived in their host countries (Zohry and Harrell-Bond 2003). The literature has



**Figure 1.** Distribution of Egyptian emigrants in Arab countries by host country (%).



**Figure 2.** Distribution of Egyptian emigrants in Western countries by host country (%).  
 Source: International Organization for Migration (2010).

accounted for this citing foreign workers' inability to settle permanently in the countries of the Arab Gulf and the relative ease of doing so in the west. Yet, this is not entirely accurate. Not all regional emigration is *de facto* temporary: Syria, Jordan and Libya, which constitute traditional destinations of Egyptian migrants in the Arab world, have, at times, granted citizenship to emigrants, particularly to Arabs (Dib 1978). But even in the countries of the Persian Gulf, it is not unusual for Egyptian migrants to remain there for over two or three decades or, even, to stay abroad until their death. Thus, given that the 'transformation of temporary immigrants into settlers cannot be ruled out' in the Gulf (Kapiszewski 2001, 193), the Egyptian state's decision to bifurcate its engagement policy merits deeper analysis (Table 1).

The differentiation between 'permanent' and 'temporary' emigrants resulted in a two-tiered emigrant policy. The former were courted by the state: a large number of them would frequently be invited back to Cairo and Alexandria, where they would be entertained by the President and the First Lady under both the administrations of both Presidents Sadat (*al-Jumhuriya*, 4 August 1976) and Mubarak (*al-Ahram*, 2 August 2010). In the aftermath of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, about 1500 emigrants from North America would receive annual tours of the Suez war front hosted by various cabinet ministers (*al-Ahram*, 17 June 1974; *al-Jumhuriya*, 27 August 1976). 'Permanent' emigrants enjoyed heightened attention of the executive and state agencies abroad: those studying in Europe and North America would receive financial support from the Egyptian President on an ad hoc basis—a grant of \$50,000, or ~\$212,000 today, was given to the Union of Egyptian students in North America, for instance (*al-Ahram*, 9 August 1976), while any problems were to be dealt with immediately, regardless of



**Table 1.** Number of Egyptian emigrants according to host country.

Host country	Number of emigrants
Austria	14,000
France	36,000
Germany	25,000
Greece	60,000
Italy	90,000
Netherlands	40,000
Spain	12,000
UK	35,000
Australia	70,000
Canada	110,000
Switzerland	14,000
USA	318,000
Total in the west	824,000
Total in the Arab World	1,685,879

Source: International Organization for Migration (2010).

cost. At one point, Sadat even had the Presidential airplane transport home Egyptians who had been unable to find employment in France (*al-Jumhuriya*, 12 July 1975).

In sharp contrast, the Egyptian state was less active in cementing the relationship between ‘temporary’ Egyptian emigrants to the Arab world and their homeland (Lesch 1985). The state’s initial involvement in regulating the outflow of Egyptian labour towards the Arab world, by coordinating requests from Arab and, to a lesser extent, African states, gradually diminished: by the 1990s, the unregulated *makatib al-tawziʿ* (non-governmental recruitment agencies) would court Arab employers who had travelled to Egypt to secure contracts for Egyptian workers. The agencies then sold these contracts at exorbitant prices to Egyptians. Currently, a work permit for Saudi Arabia is priced at 20,000 EGP (~\$2600), while a permit for Kuwait goes for 30,000 EGP (~\$4000). A multitude of bilateral and multilateral treaties signed with Arab states that aimed to regulate the outflow of Egyptian labour were never observed, and the stipulated migration quotas never enforced.

Two main hypotheses have been put forth to account for this divergence in Egypt’s emigration policy. According to the first hypothesis, the state lacks the administrative and financial capacity to cater to the needs of its extensive diaspora in the Arab world (e.g. Lesch 1985) and prefers to leave matters to ‘private initiative’ (Choucri 1977, 11). When interviewed, state policy-makers and elites have apologetically argued that it was not possible to extend the same policies to the millions working in the Arab world as to the smaller and more manageable Egyptian emigrant population in the west. However, this argument is unconvincing. Despite its alleged financial and infrastructural limitations, the state still chose to cater to a specific group of Egyptians abroad over another. Furthermore, in the pre-1973 period, emigrants to the west outnumbered regional emigrants, yet state policy has courted ‘permanent’ migrants

from 1971 onwards. Which factors determined the deliberate targeting ‘permanent’ emigrants at the expense of ‘temporary’ ones?<sup>2</sup>

The second hypothesis points to the cyclical nature of Egyptians’ regional migration as an explanatory factor for policy variation: regional migration tends to be temporary, and therefore state investment in such emigrant groups is less important than catering to emigrants in the west. When I interviewed the 2014 Minister of Migration and Manpower, Nahed Ashri, she told me: ‘Egyptians in the Arab world are not migrants. They are temporary workers, who will return home’ (Personal Interview. Cairo, Egypt; 24 February 2014). Former Minister of Health and president of Cairo University Ismail Gamil Badran informed me that the Egyptian state’s emigration policy ‘targeted the sons of Egypt abroad, not Egyptians in the Gulf’. Put bluntly, why would the state expend resources in fostering ties with emigrant groups who will, overall, eventually return to the homeland on their own? This hypothesis, implicit in much of the early literature on Middle Eastern migratory movements (Birks and Sinclair 1979), points to a more accurate understanding of state policy yet remains under-theorised. Is there a ranking in terms of the emigrant groups targeted by the Egyptian state and, if so, what determines this hierarchy? According to the hypothesis put forth in the previous section, an explanation of Egypt’s development of differentiated emigrant policies can be explained below.

### **Egyptian Emigrant Policies and Domestic Political Economy Considerations**

‘I am not opposed to migration, as we are a nation of 45 million people’  
(Hosni Mubarak, 26 February 1983; *al-Siyasa*, 26 February 1983).

This section will examine evidence for the hypothesis that domestic political economy considerations have influenced the development of Egypt’s policy with regard to both ‘permanent’ and ‘temporary’ emigration. The state’s proactive policy towards Egyptians residing in Europe and North America can be understood through the domestic political economy priorities of Presidents Sadat (1970–1981) and Mubarak (1981–2010). One of Sadat’s first policy decisions was the expulsion of Soviet advisors from Egypt as he attempted to liberalise the Egyptian economy and place it within the Western sphere of influence (Beattie 2000). His well-documented belief that the solution to Egypt’s economic woes lies in liberalisation, Western knowledge transfer, and a re-alignment with the USA was reflected in the state’s emigration policy, and the systematic courting of Egyptians in Europe and North America. The faith Sadat placed in these emigrants is apparent by the fact that, just before the massive 1977 ‘Bread Riots’, he ‘asked Egyptian scientists abroad to participate in solving Egypt’s food and housing crisis’ (*al-Ahram*, 5 January 1977), much as he had sought their expertise when presenting his plans to liberalise the Egyptian economy (*al-Ahram*, 21 April 1974). This extended to public pleas for these emigrants to ‘contribute materially’ to the homeland’s development (*al-Ahram*, 28 February 1977). The belief that ‘permanent’ emigrants will aid in the country’s development is further documented in the themes of the bi-annual, state-sponsored conferences organised

through the 'Friends of Egypt' organisation. The target of these events was Egyptians residing in Western countries, according to organiser Dr Badran, and the professed aim was to 'bring successful Egyptians back to the homeland' (Table 2).

Thus, as the perceived domestic political economy utility of this population group abroad was negative for the Egyptian state, the latter subsequently developed an extensive emigrant policy aiming to ensure Egyptians' return to the homeland. A central aim of the policies and broader discourse that the state developed was the return of these emigrants, targeting them from the early stages of their emigration. While the acquisition, or upgrading, of skills was seen as beneficial by the state, it was ultimately overshadowed by the assumption that these migrants would not return. As Sadat stated, 'a considerable number of Egyptian scientists work abroad. Some have attained extremely high levels of education, and there is no objection to having them come back to contribute to the country's scientific development. With their experience acquired abroad, those scientists could offer much' (*al-Akhbar*, 11 October 1971).

State policy extended beyond mere financial incentives (for instance, beneficial access to housing), or the ad hoc creation of 'Visiting Professor' posts in universities to be occupied by Egyptian scientists residing abroad (*al-Ahram*, 21 April 1974). The degree to which the Egyptian state wanted their return was evident from the decision to grant legal amnesty to 'permanent' emigrants for past offences. Under Nasser, many middle-class families had sent their sons to Europe and North America to avoid mandatory military conscription, both before and after the 1967 War. By the early 1970s, these emigrants were unable to return to Egypt, where they would face persecution. As former Minister of Youth (1999–2004) Ali E. Hillal Dessouki recalled, President Sadat decided to grant a general amnesty to all Egyptians who had escaped conscription and dispatched military attachés abroad inviting the emigrants back to Egypt (Personal Interview. Cairo, Egypt; 13 April 2014).

The perceived utility of such 'permanent' emigrants, and the desire to bring them back home, was evident in their descriptions by the mainstream Egyptian media. Indicatively:

Egypt's youthful skills have stolen the limelight and come to be the country's staple crop. Some of them get higher salaries than Dr. Henry Kissinger while still in their forties. Some lead the same lavish life as Hollywood stars. They own villas with fragrant gardens and as many as three cars each. One of them travels by private helicopter from his country home to his place of work inside New York! But our country will not lose the brains we export to the outside world. For a successful Egyptian must be back home one day to drink again from the Nile and to live with the generous people [of Egypt]. An Egyptian travels but does not go for good, for he always returns (*al-Akhbar*, 30 June 1975).

Why was this proactive policy not extended to the 'temporary' Egyptian emigrants across the Arab world? As per my hypothesis, these emigrants' perceived domestic political economy utility abroad was positive for two reasons. First, their emigration was a solution to Egypt's chronic problems of unemployment and overpopulation

**Table 2.** ‘Friends of Egypt’ conference titles.

Year	Conference titles
1974	Organising modes of communication with Egyptian scholars abroad
1976	Development of the desert
1978	Development of the countryside as a source of complete development
1980	Development under the umbrella of peace
1982	The role of science and technology in Egyptian development
1984	Environmental problems of development
1986	Economic development in Egypt
1988	Education in Egypt
1990	Egypt’s human resources
1992	Water resources and development in Egypt
1994	Energy and continuous development in Egypt
1996	Unemployment in Egypt
1998	Development of the desert in the third millennium
2001	Modernising Egypt
2003	Human development in the third millennium
2005	Information technology and its role in development
2009	Care, communication and development

Source: Ibrahim Gamil Badran (President of ‘Friends of Egypt’ Organization; Minister of Health, 1976–1978; President, 1978–1980, *Cairo University*), Personal Interview. Cairo, Egypt; 21 Jan. 2014.

and, second, they provided extensive financial support to Egypt through remittances. In terms of the former, my interviewees invariably pointed out that regional emigrants have historically been mostly low- and medium-skilled workers. Temporary emigration was considered the ‘safety valve’ that would relieve the two major burdens of Egypt’s domestic economy, overpopulation and unemployment: Former Prime Minister Hegazy (1974–1975) informed me that Nasser had entrusted him, already in 1968, with introducing policies that would allow Egypt to ‘export’ its excess labour to neighbouring countries. By 1975, Prime Minister Mamdouh Salem declared that emigration was the official target of the nation (*al-Akhbar*, 15 August 1975). Thus, prospective emigrants to the Arab world were not regarded as an asset by the state: ‘We should view the millions of Egyptians remaining in the country as a burden’, writes journalist and writer Anis Mansour, ‘which we should reduce by having them emigrate or exported’ (*al-Akhbar*, 9 April 1975). ‘At least a partial solution, a way of easing the pressure’, confessed Egypt’s Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Boutros-Ghali (1977, 1978–1979), is ‘for Egypt to ‘export’ Egyptians to other Arab nations’ (*Washington Post*, 27 January 1982).

Additionally, regional emigrants’ remittances further underlined the positive utility of this group abroad for the Egyptian state. Regional emigrants’ remittances have always vastly exceeded those from the west in the aftermath of the 1973 crisis. By 1977, the Egyptian Government put forth its five-year economic plan predicting as much as 350 million EGP in net returns from incomes abroad. According to data from the Egyptian Central Bank, in the early 1990s migrants’ remittances accounted for over 14% of its GDP. These remittances originate chiefly from Egyptians

employed in the Arab world: according to the most recent available data, remittances from workers in Saudi Arabia accounted for 42.7% of net private transfers to Egypt in 2012, followed by Kuwait (21.3%) and the United Arab Emirates (12.2%; Figures 3 and 4).

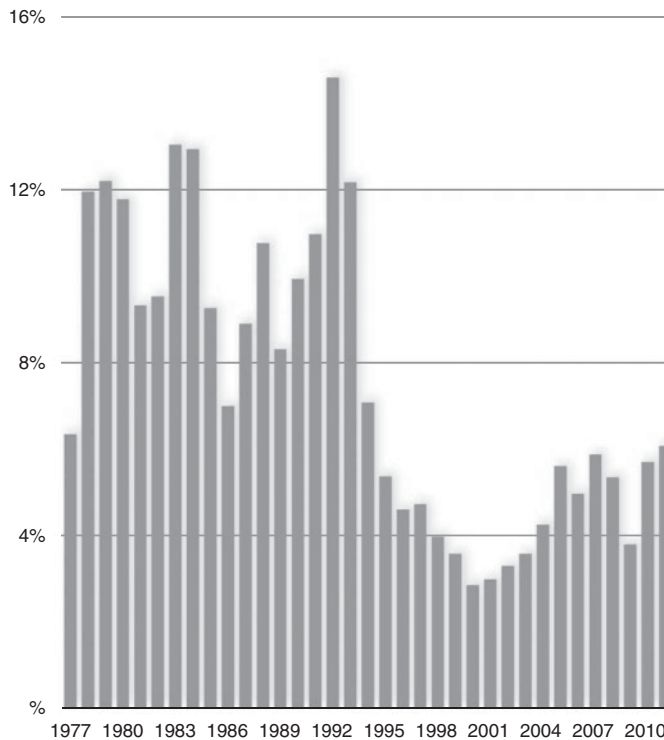
I hypothesise that, given their perception as an asset to Egypt's domestic political economy abroad, the state chose to discourage regional emigrants' return to the homeland by minimising its emigrant policy towards them and favouring 'permanent' emigrants instead. In sharp contrast to the state's wish for the return of emigrants from North America and Europe, a mass return of Egyptians working in the Arab countries would constitute a tremendous socio-economic problem for the Egyptian state. When Libya's Gadhafi expelled thousands of Egyptians in 1977, the state scrambled to provide accommodation and nourishment for the returnees, let alone new employment opportunities (*al-Akhbar*, 10 May 1977). I frequently encountered the fear in Egyptian policy-making circles that a potential return of regional migrants would disturb the flow of remittances to the state. In the early 1990s, the regime's support of Kuwait in the Iraq War resulted in Saudi Arabia 'rewarding' Mubarak by not deporting the thousands of Egyptians working in the Kingdom who continued to send back much-needed remittances.

The counterintuitive nature of my hypothesis (that a state does not expand capital towards its most 'valuable' emigrant group abroad) might suggest that this was a policy miscalculation on behalf of the Egyptian state or a case of path dependence: by the time the Egyptian state realised that regional emigrants were able to send an unprecedented level of remittances back to the homeland, Egypt's policy had been established to provide for 'permanent' emigrants rather than 'temporary' ones. Thus, Law 111/1983, which enshrined this policy differentiation, should be seen as a case of policy entrenchment: the cost of switching to a new policy would have been extremely high, despite regional migrants' high domestic political utility. Yet, there is no evidence of any serious debate on such a policy shift. Furthermore, within a state governed by a non-democratic regime, such as Egypt's, the executive is much freer to shape state policy to its demands. The opportunity cost of switching emigrant policy (a 'low-policy', by most accounts) would not have been exorbitant. The validity of this paper's hypothesis will become clearer in the following section, which explains how foreign policy objectives determine an emigrant group's utility.

### **Egyptian Emigrant Policies and Foreign Policy Imperatives**

I do not oppose emigration to highly developed countries for the purposes of becoming acquainted with the latest technological advances [...] As for Egyptian emigration to Arab and African states Egypt will continue to meet the manpower requirements of these countries (Anwar Sadat, 5 January 1977).

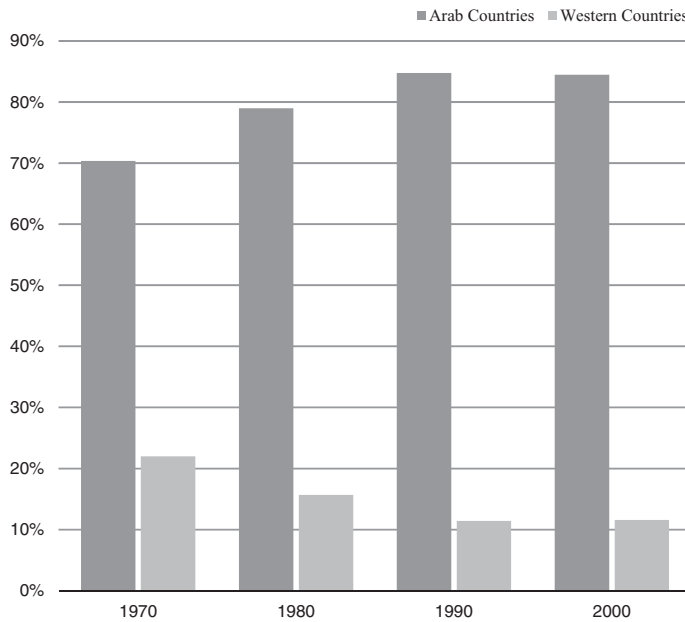
This section will examine how Egypt's differentiated policy served the state's foreign policy directives under the Sadat and Mubarak regimes. On the one hand, the utility of 'permanent' emigrants in terms of Egypt's foreign policy was perceived as negative:



**Figure 3.** Personal remittances received, 1977–2011 (% of Egypt's GDP).  
 Source: Author's compilation (Central Bank of Egypt data).

not only did they represent the country's 'brain drain', they frequently criticised the Egyptian regime through the media and various protests, tarnishing the regime's 'democratising' image abroad and its *rapprochement* with the USA. I hypothesise that, given that 'permanent' emigrants were not seen as useful abroad for the state's foreign policy, Egypt fostered their return. On the other hand, 'temporary' migration maintained Egypt's regional relevance after the Six Day War of 1967 and mitigated the effects of Egypt's isolation following the 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel. Therefore, as the utility of 'temporary' emigrants was perceived as positive, policy towards them was minimal. The state was unwilling to risk this steady outflow by pressuring for better human rights protection or improved working rights for these emigrants. It merely maintained an outflow of labour to the region and discouraged emigrants' return.

Until the late 1960s, modern Egypt's foreign relations had been marked by Nasser's emphasis on the 'positive neutrality' doctrine of non-alignment, on a cautious relationship with the Soviet Union, and on antagonism towards the oil-rich countries of the Arab world, namely Saudi Arabia (Kerr 1971). The state's foreign policy underwent a radical shift as the centre of Arab power shifted away from Egypt towards the oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf in the aftermath of the Six Day War



**Figure 4.** Personal remittances to Egypt by emigrants' host country (% of total).  
 Source: Author's compilation (Central Bank of Egypt and World Bank data).

and, even more heavily, following the 1973 War (Korany and Dessouki 2008). The distrust that Nasser exhibited towards both the USA and Egypt's regional Arab neighbours was reversed under Sadat, despite his signing of the 1979 peace treaty with Israel, which was ill-received by the Arabs. The Egyptian state's pro-American and pro-Saudi orientation was further solidified under Mubarak. Overall, emigrant policy complemented Egypt's new foreign policy strategies of rapprochement towards both the oil-rich countries of the Arab world and the USA.

I hypothesise that the perceived foreign policy utility of 'permanent' emigrants was negative for two reasons: first, emigrants to the 'west' were traditionally perceived as the core of the state's 'brain drain' issue (*al-Akhbar*, 27 October 1978). Statistical data on Egyptian migrants' levels of education in each host state are unavailable, but the dominant perception of state elites in Egypt remains that 'as far as permanent migration to more developed countries is concerned, this has always mainly interested more educated workers' (Talani 2009, 184); while skilled Egyptian labour did emigrate across the region, the literature agrees that 'brain drain' occurred mainly to the west and, particularly, towards the USA and Canada (Zohry and Harrell-Bond 2003, 47–48). Not only did they detract from Egypt's image of a stable country (an image that Presidents Sadat and Mubarak were eager to present to the outside world), they were perceived as smearing it, by pinpointing Egypt's inability to provide employment opportunities for its educated citizens. Many government officials I interviewed considered such emigration a 'taboo' that should not be discussed, lest it

somehow reveal a version of Egypt that was far from perfect. Interestingly, Egyptians residing in the west have been perceived as more susceptible to Israeli influence—the media frequently published stories of Israel attempting to recruit Egyptian youth abroad. In the case of one Egyptian abroad, ‘the Israeli intelligence who is always watching for [Egyptians] to recruit for work, was ready for him and flooded him with money, women, and red nights’ (*al-Jumhuriya*, 30 November 1975). While such reports are frequently exaggerated, they nonetheless reveal the state’s loss of control over ‘permanent’ emigrants.

Second, the perceived utility of Egyptians in the ‘west’ was also affected by emigrants’ public protests, media campaigns or other attempts at drawing attention to the authoritarian nature of the Egyptian ruling regime. I do not argue that all Egyptians were politically active nor that pro-regime activism was unheard of. In fact, Sadat frequently employed the support of ‘permanent’ emigrants for his regime, for instance by producing telegrams that expatriates in Europe and North America had sent to Sadat or Mubarak, expressing their enthusiasm for the regime’s political programme and publishing them in the press. On 21 April 1974, for instance, *al-Akhbar* details how, in their cable, ‘expatriates thanked the President for meeting them and speaking to them as well as for his obvious care for them. They also greeted the President and pledged allegiance to their great people’. Through such acts, he hoped to gain both domestic and international points, mainly from Washington. One example was the August 1977 Conference of Egyptian students in North America, for which 70 Egyptian students were flown to Cairo on President Sadat’s private airplane for the two-week event. Reported on all three major newspapers was a cable the students sent to Sadat:

Addressing President Sadat as a father, the cable said that, on approaching the air strip of their dear fatherland, they would like to express sincere thanks and gratitude for honouring them by providing them with the opportunity to visit their dear Egypt and mother country aboard the President’s private plane. The cable said that the President has always acted like that (9 August 1977).

Yet, anti-Sadat and anti-Mubarak protests quickly overshadowed such pro-regime actions. Once Egyptians in Europe and North America began voicing their dissatisfaction with Presidents Sadat and Mubarak, the regime was no longer able to argue that it enjoyed expatriates’ support, in domestic or international politics. Such protests tarnished the image of Egypt abroad even more than the ‘brain drain’ issue, given the emphasis that both Sadat and Mubarak placed on their perception in the west. One of the most prominent protests was staged during Sadat’s final visit to Washington in 1981, after which the President jailed about 1500 perceived political opponents in Egypt.

Given the negative net utility of ‘permanent’ emigrants to the foreign policy directives of the Egyptian state, emigrant policy was shaped in such a way as to co-opt them. For Egyptians studying in Britain, for instance, Sadat offered ‘eleven pilgrimage tickets, an Islamic library of 2000 volumes and a large number of recorded



recitations of the Qur'an' (*al-Jumhuriya*, 12 May 1974). On the occasion of the aforementioned visit of North American Egyptian students to Cairo, Sadat had the Ministry of Information 'offer 6000 EGP to consolidate the budget of the Egyptian Student Union in the United States and Canada' (*al-Jumhuriya*, 12 August 1977). Such symbolic efforts were utilised to put forth an image of Egypt that corresponded to the foreign policy demands of the time—a politically liberal state that cared for its citizens in the west.

On the other hand, the utility of 'temporary' emigrants for Egypt's foreign policy was perceived as extremely positive. This is attributed to two factors: first, regional emigration allowed Egypt to maintain its regional relevance in the aftermath of the Six Day War; and second, it mitigated the effects of Egypt's isolation following the 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel. In terms of the former, President Sadat employed Egypt's potential as a provider of labour to the Arab world heavily in his foreign policy. As early as 1973, he highlighted the continuing importance of Egypt as the region's most populous country in terms of its contribution to the wars against Israel. Egyptian officials argued that it was not merely the oil embargo that played an integral part in the 1973 War but also Egypt's 'enormous' sacrifices in terms of manpower. 'Egypt', prominent journalist Musa Sabry wrote in *al-Akhbar*, 'is the Arabs' fortress; she has sacrificed 100,000 martyrs over 4 wars'. Once hostilities ended, and oil-rich Arab countries began to employ the vast profits of the oil price rises for their modernisation and industrialisation programmes, Sadat signalled that Egypt's abundant manpower was now ready to be deployed to service the needs of its Arab neighbours. By the end of the decade, Egypt's role as a regional supplier of labour had 'become a tradition' (Birks and Sinclair 1978, 12).

In terms of Egypt's foreign policy, it enabled a gradual rapprochement between Sadat's regime and the oil-rich countries, enshrined in the numerous, frequently overlapping agreements signed between Egypt and other Arab states (see Table 3), where development projects were heavily reliant on large numbers of foreign workers. As mentioned above, the stipulations of these intra-state agreements were rarely followed. In fact, in an interview, longtime Minister of Manpower and Migration (2006–2011, 2014–), Aisha Abdel-Hady, admitted she was unaware of many of these treaties' content (which is typically not made public) or, even, their existence. This is not surprising given that Egyptian state officials have often admitted that regional migration processes are so complex and they cannot be effectively regulated in intra-state accords. Thus, one can only surmise that the multiple, overlapping agreements signed with host states were aimed more at solidifying Egypt's position within the Arab world, rather than at regulating regional emigration.

At the same time, the country's newfound comparative advantage as a source of migrant labour was used by Egypt to end its post-1979 foreign policy regional isolation. The aftermath of the 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel, one of the most controversial decisions of Egyptian foreign policy, saw Egypt regionally isolated. Despite the economic embargo imposed on Egypt by Arab states and the freezing of the country's membership of the League of Arab States, Egyptian emigrants remained

across the region, softening the blow to the Egyptian economy. Following Sadat's death, Mubarak continued to support Egyptian emigration across the Arab world and further signed a number of additional bilateral agreements on the issue (as seen in Table 3), as part of his policy of restoring Egypt's regional position.

Therefore, it was in the Egyptian state's best interest to continue sending emigrants across the region. The state's emigrant policy was shaped accordingly: the emphasis on the 'temporary' aspect of such migration aimed to mollify Arab countries' misapprehensions about opening their borders to millions of Egyptian migrants. In the 1950s and 1960s, reports of Egyptians abroad spreading Nasserite ideology and disseminating propaganda material in their host states were frequent across the Arab world, from Libya and Algeria to Syria and Yemen, and even more so in the Gulf states. Arab states' distrust of Nasser's propaganda machine and the disturbing political effects of Egyptian immigration are well documented (Tsourapas 2015b). Sadat was able to overcome host states' objections by discursively presenting post-1970 migration as de-politicised, driven by economic rather than ideological reasons and, above all, 'temporary'.

Sadat asserted that the Egyptian state abroad would no longer support Egyptian migrants' interference in the political scene of other Arab states. According to Anis Mansour:

[A]n Egyptian was looked upon as the man with the 'ugly face' throughout the Arab world. For twenty years, every Egyptian had seemed to turn into a spy or saboteur. Every Egyptian teacher was thought to have come to overthrow the standing rule and to distribute subversive literature. Every Egyptian doctor was considered a spy acting for Egyptian Intelligence Service to set one class against another. [...] Now he is not interested in other peoples' own affairs. 'Give and take' is his motto (*al-Akhbar*, 13 March 1974).

Emigrants' de-politicisation was combined with the 'temporary' nature of their stay, in order to further appease the host states' concerns and ensure a continuing demand for Egyptian labour. The state's position that these Egyptians were by no means' emigrants but temporary workers who would return in a few years (as stated above) should be seen in this light. As Ali Amin wrote:

Egypt will never think of interfering with the internal affairs of any Arab state. Neither will it impose an opinion, a certain person, policy, or form of government on them, be it Beirut, Amman, Damascus, Tripoli, Kuwait, or the Arabian Gulf. Every Arab people has come of political age [...] Sadat believes Arab nationalism does not mean the imposition by Egypt of its own views but rather that it should bow to every Arab people's own choice' (*al-Ahram*, 7 April 1974).

As a result of their professed political neutrality, Egyptian workers were commonly preferred over Palestinians or Yemenis, who were considered agitators.

Overall, the expansive emigrant policy towards Egyptians in the 'west' can be comprehended in light of their negative utility abroad. In the case of regional

**Table 3.** Emigration-related agreements (treaties, memoranda of understanding and protocols) between Egypt and Arab states, 1971–2011.

Year	Countries
1971	Egypt–Libya
1972	Egypt–Algeria
1974	Egypt–Jordan
1974	Egypt–Qatar
1975	Egypt–Iraq
1981	Egypt–Jordan
1985	Egypt–Jordan
1985	Egypt–Iraq
1993	Egypt–Iraq
1993	Egypt–Lebanon
1993	Egypt–United Arab Emirates
1994	Egypt–United Arab Emirates
1994	Egypt–Libya
1997	Egypt–Yemen
1998	Egypt–Lebanon
2001	Egypt–Tunisia
2003	Egypt–Sudan
2007	Egypt–Jordan
2007	Egypt–Saudi Arabia
2009	Egypt–Libya

Source: Author's compilation.

migration, Egypt's minimal policy further reflected the power asymmetries within the Middle East and between host and sending states in general. While it initially appears counterintuitive that an emigrant group with high foreign policy utility enjoyed only minimal support from the sending state, such a policy ensured that host states would continue to demand, and employ, Egyptian labour. Egyptian emigrant labour continued to be attractive partly due to the absence of the state's involvement in its affairs, refusing to intervene even at instances of human rights violations. When Libya, for instance, in early August 1977, expelled thousands of Egyptian engineers, lawyers and workers, the Egyptian state responded in a lacklustre manner. The extent of Egyptians' plight in Libya was consistently underplayed (Tsourapas 2015a). Any potential attempt at protesting against human rights abuses or pressuring for better working conditions for Egyptians in the Arab world was out of the question, if Egypt wanted to maintain a steady outflow of emigrant workers.

By identifying the domestic political economy and foreign policy determinants of Egypt's emigrant policy, I have outlined a case of distinct policy bifurcation that is unique from other states that typically receive scholarly attention, rendering the Egyptian example internationally relevant. How does this theorisation travel beyond the Egyptian case? In Japan, the negative utility of emigrants and their descendants in Latin America during the late 1980s (perceived as offering little to the state from abroad, both in terms of political economy and foreign policy-wise at times of massive Japanese manpower needs) led to a proactive emigrant policy that attracted

thousands of emigrants, or *nikkeijin*, back to Japan (Yamanaka 1996). Once the recent financial slowdown in Japan highlighted the potential positive utility of these groups abroad, the Japanese state not only did away with this proactive emigrant policy but is offering ¥300,000 to those willing to emigrate back to Latin America. Similar distinctions have evolved in other major migrant sending states—such as India, which distinguishes between persons of Indian origin (PIOs) and non-resident Indians (NRIs) (Naujoks 2013).

## Conclusion

States do not assume that all citizens who emigrate are equally important. Why should one assume that their emigration and diaspora policies are homogenous? Empirically, multi-tier emigration policies exhibit variation by age, sex, educational level and occupation status. The tentative data from Egypt presented here indicate that there is within-state variation in policy according to emigrants' host country. My hypothesis is that a state is more likely to develop an emigrant policy (i.e. a policy of emigration and return migration) towards a population group abroad when that group's perceived utility is negative and vice versa. This utility is based on the sending state's domestic political economy and foreign policy goals. In the Egyptian case, an emigrant policy did not develop towards those Egyptians in the Arab world but did develop for those Egyptians in the west.

Beyond a theorisation of sending states' differentiated engagement policies, this paper offers a novel account of the debates on emigration within the four decades of rule under Presidents Sadat and Mubarak. I attempted to bypass the standard perception of post-1970 Egypt as a typical 'emigration state' by highlighting two unexplored aspects that help us better understand its relationship with the west and with the Arab world. First, that the Egyptian regime's shift towards a pro-Western orientation created novel tensions within-state elites both with respect to 'brain drain' concerns, as well as with emigrants' political activism in the west. Second, I underline the extent to which Egyptian 'temporary' emigration has been implicated in solidifying Egypt's regional role. The regional interplay between migration and foreign policy can help in better understanding current regional debates—such as the processes of substituting Arab labour for Asian labour or, more recently, the move towards nationalising the private sector labour force in the Gulf states. Domestically, this analysis can help explore how new tensions manifested in the post-Mubarak period. The political engagement and organised protests of Egyptians residing in Europe and North America throughout the Egyptian 'Arab Spring', for instance, confirm the negative utility that the pre-2011 Egyptian regime ascribed to these communities, although the 2011 introduction of out-of-country voting for both 'permanent' and 'temporary' migrants will complicate the distinction between the two communities in the future.

Ultimately, this article aims to sketch an evolving research agenda regarding the rationale behind sending states' selective engagement with emigrant population

groups abroad. At the same time, while the Egyptian case is perfectly correlated, enabling fairly obvious conclusions regarding the utility of specific population groups over others, other cases might prove more complicated—when, for instance, a population group is perceived as a foreign policy asset but a political economy burden abroad or vice versa. Thus, having established through this single-case study that states do develop two-tier emigrant policies aiming to foster both their economic development and foreign policy agendas, this article paves the way for future research across multiple cases.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to Tara Buss, Philippe Fargues, Katherine Tennis and Fergus Reoch for their generous comments on the manuscript. I also wish to thank Bilgin Ayata, Ahmed Azzam, Laleh Khalili and Lachezara Stoeva for important insights. Earlier versions of the manuscript were presented at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, at the 5th Gulf Research Meeting and at the Migration Working Group of the European University Institute.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### **Notes**

- [1] This article examines policy during the 1970–2011 period, before the 2011 uprisings brought an end to the military rule that had continued uninterrupted since the 1952 Revolution. As a legal framework regarding emigration did not emerge until 1970–1971, this article is not concerned with the 1952–1970 period.
- [2] The hypothesis that the nature of the host state's regime constitutes a causal factor (i.e. Arab authoritarian regimes versus Western democracies) is problematic. Lebanon, for instance, has traditionally been democratic, but Egyptians there receive a treatment similar to those working in the Gulf, while, during the cold war, Egyptians in Eastern Europe received equal attention as those in the USA.

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