

## Political remittances of migrant workers in Indonesia and the Philippines: Preliminary research

### *Politik remitansi pekerja migran di Indonesia dan Filipina: Studi pendahuluan*

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#### **ABSTRACT**

In-depth studies on political remittances are rarely conducted, particularly in the case of Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, which contribute a significant number of migrants. This article compares international migrant workers in the two countries, focusing on exploring value, network, and action variables. These three variables describe the extent to which political remittances transform and provide benefits to their country of origin. Using the case-comparison method, this article finds that international migrant workers in the Philippines can optimise their political remittances better than in Indonesia. This article is an initial study to explain the degree of success with causal explanations that can be empirically tested in various contexts of changing political regimes and regulations.

Keywords: political remittances, Indonesian migrant workers, overseas Filipino workers

#### **ABSTRAK**

*Kajian mendalam terkait remitansi politik masih jarang dilakukan, terutama dalam konteks negara-negara Asia Tenggara, seperti Indonesia dan Filipina, yang mengirimkan migran dalam jumlah besar. Kajian ini membandingkan pekerja migran internasional di kedua negara tersebut dengan berfokus pada eksplorasi variabel-variabel terkait nilai, jaringan, dan aksi. Ketiga variabel tersebut menjelaskan seberapa jauh remitansi politik bertransformasi dan memberikan keuntungan bagi negara asal. Dengan menggunakan metode perbandingan kasus, tulisan ini menemukan bahwa pekerja migran internasional dari Filipina lebih baik dalam optimalisasi remitansi politik mereka dibandingkan migran dari Indonesia. Tulisan ini merupakan kajian awal yang dapat menjelaskan secara kasual tingkat keberhasilan migran, dan temuan ini dapat diuji secara empiris pada berbagai konteks perubahan rezim politik dan kebijakan.*

*Kata kunci: remitansi politik, pekerja migran Indonesia, pekerja internasional Filipina*



## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia and the Philippines are major contributors to the flow of migrant workers abroad. In 2019, there were 2.2 million overseas Filipino workers (OFW)<sup>1</sup> and 1.55 million migrant workers from Indonesia (*Pekerja Migran Indonesia*, PMI)<sup>2</sup>. The international migration rate from the Philippines has increased substantially before 2016. In Indonesia, the rate of international migration that began in the 1970s was relatively small but rose remarkably in the 1990s.

The discussion of international migration is often linked to the issue of remittances. International migrants are considered to significantly contribute to their countries through remittances. However, two essential factors determine the extent of their contribution. First, the interaction process that the migrants had established in the destination countries. The process will align with the breadth and depth of the industry or division of labour in which they work and operate. Second, transmission patterns of knowledge, information, and reciprocal relationships between migrants and their family or community in the country of origin. Transmission is enabled through encounters and communication with their families and through their activities once they return home.

The issue of remittances, specifically financial, is linked to the promotion of democratisation (Bastiaens and Tirone, 2019; Escribà-Folch et al., 2022; Maia & Lu, 2021; Pérez-Armendáriz & Crow, 2010; Pfütze, 2007). However, the impact of financial remittances on democracy in the Philippines remains uncertain due to insufficient evidence showing how remittances can enhance the political participation of migrants during elections (Oh, 2016). Political participation of the migrant can also be influenced by the advisory by international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and their local networks, as evidenced in Indonesia and the Philippines (Ford, 2004). Unfortunately, the effectiveness of the advisory

is compromised by the presence of numerous groups, which diminishes their ability to negotiate effectively. This phenomenon is shown by the case of Indonesian migrants in Hong Kong (Amalia, 2020). Examining political remittances offers a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between migrants' participation in political activities in the host country and their subsequent actions upon returning to their country of origin.

This study provides a map of the political activities of Indonesian and Philippines migrant workers in their countries of origin. This study compares them based on three variables: values, networks, and actions. Values refer to the fundamental political principles that migrants bring. Networks, which can be intra- and inter-networks, refer to connectivity and interaction between migrants in destination countries and institutions outside their communities. Meanwhile, actions refer to the outcomes of actions in the form of advocacy, socio-political movements, and responses from migrants to political issues and policy changes.

This study addresses the following questions: (1) What can be gleaned from the political activities of migrants in Indonesia and the Philippines? and (2) What is the relationship between values, networks, and actions among migrants to produce political remittances? This study evaluates descriptive data sources to describe the distribution of international migration between democratic and non-democratic destination countries. Additionally, this article describes migrants' type of work to understand their interaction models in destination countries and how they transmit life experiences to their home country. Lastly, this study elaborates on several case studies of migrants' origin communities and regions in Indonesia and the Philippines.

### Politics and Migrants: A Review of Literature

Various aspects of the transmission of political consciousness, as manifested in various political activities, policy advocacy, and election mobilisation, have rarely been investigated in

<sup>1</sup> <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos>

<sup>2</sup> <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2019/07/30/2014-maret-2019-penempatan-pekerja-migran-capai-155-juta>

studies on return migrants. Batista and Vicente (2011), Chauvet and Mercier (2014), and Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow (2010) argued that return migrants brought democratic political values, perspectives, and awareness to their countries of origin, particularly in terms of political accountability. However, the migrants' working country is a crucial variable in determining the extent of the transmission and its implementation. Migrants who worked in advanced and stable democracies have different experiences from those who worked in autocratic states. For instance, expatriates who work in developed nations such as the US and Western Europe, where democracy has been well established, may face difficulties in transmitting political consciousness to their home countries. Their contribution can also be limited since they are mainly lower-class members without access to an influential political network.

Several investigations have been conducted on the effect of international migration on political life in origin countries (Barsbai et al., 2017; Córdova & Hiskey, 2015; Kapur, 2010, 2014; Meseguer & Burgess, 2014). These studies suggested that returning migrants require at least two factors to transmit their sociopolitical experience. First, channels to political actors that control various public or political institutions in their home countries. This connection can be direct or infiltrative through formal channels, kinship, or group interaction. Migrants can influence or be involved in public debates, socio-political activism, and membership in political parties. Second, greater financial capacity and the ability to build political networks and movements. Financial remittances can place migrants as new players in the trade cycle or other lines of business where their existence is eventually recognised and influences society.

Political remittances from migrants should be incorporated into the 'new development mantra' as a contributing factor or a potential barrier to the construction of democracy (Rother, 2009). Unstable political conditions and the authoritarian regime in their home country provide a compelling explanation for international migration. This motivation is primarily held by educated migrants who move

to established democratic countries. They can acquire new experiences and internalise democratic values and ways of life in the destination country (Rother, 2009). In different cases, migrants working in non-democratic countries are more motivated to collect financial remittances. There is not yet sufficient evidence that migrants in nondemocratic countries bring political remittances, either democratic values or autocratic-authoritarian values, and state ideological models to their countries of origin.

Although political remittances play a crucial role in explaining transformation, it is difficult to identify the impact or direct causal relationship between migration and the improvement of democratic institutions in countries of origin. This is because specific characteristics, such as religion and ethnicity, cannot be adequately observed. Furthermore, the issue of reciprocal causality makes it challenging to estimate, for instance, the similarities between migrants from democratic and non-democratic countries. Therefore, the spatial distribution of migrants is critical to assessing the extent of their contribution to improving the political situation in their home country (Meseguer & Burgess, 2014).

International migration and remittances can influence politics directly or indirectly. The effects of financial remittances include a reduction in reliance on the state to provide public services, access to social security, higher levels of education, and alterations to the middle class' way of life. Families of migrants who are financially stable and have access to life's necessities and a better education can strengthen economic stability and contribute to a higher quality of education. Chauvet and Mercier (2014) found a correlation between migrants' high income and political participation in local or national elections. Other studies have found that non-electoral models of political participation, such as involvement in civic organisations and policy advocacy, are more prevalent. The relationship between economic remittances and organisational membership is positive (Careja et al., 2015; Hiskey & Córdova, 2012; Pérez-Armendáriz & Crow, 2010). Furthermore, Piper and Rother (2020) introduced the concept of

political remittances that examine the effects of transferring ideas and practices and focus on the recipients of such advocacy efforts. However, there is a dearth of research dedicated to this subject. Therefore, an in-depth examination of political remittances within the framework of the interconnection of countries through global migration flows is imperative.

### **Political Remittances: A Theoretical Structure**

International migration is influenced by demographic changes, economic development, state formation, and international emigration (de Haas 2010; Skeldon 1997; Zelinsky 1971). State policy also plays an important role in determining the direction of migration and managing migrants' benefits in their home country (de Haas et al., 2019). To ensure the welfare of its citizens abroad, sending countries must enact regulations that facilitate the migration process. Additionally, many countries provide various forms of assistance and training to international migrants so that they can find employment in their home countries once they return.

Most of the research on migrants has focused on economic remittances as the primary manifestation of migrants' motivations for working abroad. In addition, they also bring social remittances in the forms of social impacts, behaviour changes, and culture when they return to their origin areas. The latter type of remittances has influenced efforts to conduct additional research on political remittances that demonstrate transnational exchanges among migrants in their destination country. Their political experiences, ideas, values, and expectations can motivate them to participate in political activities in their home country (Lacroix et al., 2016; Piper, 2009).

There are distinctions between democratic and non-democratic host nations regarding their influence on migrants. In the context of migrants from Indonesia who are predominantly Muslim and serve as domestic workers in Middle Eastern nations, they returned home believing that an absolute monarchy could bring prosperity to their subjects. However, this does not inherently

motivate them to engage in social and political activities after returning home, except for their religious beliefs and principles. In the case of Mexico, cross-border social networks facilitate interaction between migrants in the United States and their families in Mexico and generate political interest and the belief that free and fair electoral institutions are required (Duguet-Rury et al., 2018). Political remittance is an intriguing concept since it provides an analytical perspective from which migrants have the potential to influence political practices that link origin and destination countries. The composite nature of political remittances distinguishes the factors influencing transmission, political practices, and belonging narratives, linking migrants' place of destination and origin (Krawatzek & Funk, 2020).

International migrants have been found to influence changes in political behaviour in home countries. The direct political influence that can be identified relates to electoral and non-electoral activities such as supporting candidates from parties or their policies, making financial contributions during the campaign process, mobilising expatriates' political rights, and encouraging local governments to invest in the public good sector with migrant remittances. Non-electoral activities, such as membership in civic organisations, are more prevalent than electoral ones (Goodman & Hiskey, 2008; Hiskey & Córdova, 2012; Pérez-Armendáriz & Crow, 2010;). However, it remains ambiguous whether political remittances directly affect political development in the countries of origin. Additionally, migrants and nonmigrants have different perspectives on engaging in non-electoral political activities with positive implications for democracy (Burgess, 2014).

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study is a case study comparison of Indonesia and the Philippines, the two main sending countries for international migrants in Southeast Asia. This study aims to investigate political remittances by examining three variables: values, networks, and actions, together with their respective indicators (Table 1). This study examines the effects of political

remittances on individual actions in mobilising public support for electoral political goals that lead to competition in elections or non-electoral activities. The analytical stage for this study starts with identifying the countries of destination of international migrants and analysing their job category. The next step is to determine which case studies to highlight by tracing the origin areas of migrants who worked in prominent destination countries. Next, this study creates tabulations and comparison matrices of government-run programmes for migrants, particularly for return migrants. This study describes government programmes related to policy advocacy, collective social and economic empowerment, and facilitation of migrant organisations. Additionally, this article compares the programmes and assistance conducted by various NGOs working to empower and protect migrants. The analysis results provide an overview of the transmission of connected values from abroad, the utilisation of networks to carry out socio-political activities, and the contribution and effect of the activities.

**Table 1. Variable and indicators of political remittance**

Variable	Indicator
Value	Political Openness Democratic Principle Public Policy Orientation
Network	National and International NGO Political Party Local Government Private Sector Community
Action	Policy Advocacy Civic Forum Party Management Partnership with Government Community development

Sources: Developed by the author

This study employs variable-centred explanations, in which the variable occupies a central position. Based on the variables that are viewed as the actualisation of the political activities of migrants, it is possible to see clearer comparison results between the cases in the Philippines and Indonesia. However, this paper does not provide a case-by-case explanation on a micro basis. Data is collected from official

government sources and reports from authoritative institutions, including NGOs and academic institutions. The analysis was conducted from a historical point of view to discern significant stages that distinguish the efforts and achievements of the two nations in their management of international migration. In addition, the findings were enriched with narrative data extracted from media stories. The temporal scope of this study is not explicitly restricted. However, it encompasses data collected up to 2020.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Migrants in the Philippines

In the early twentieth century, most Filipinos migrated to the US to work in agriculture, manufacturing, and the military. Professionals, physicians, and engineers were added in the subsequent phase. Following the establishment of the Overseas Employment Development Board in the 1970s, construction, and petrochemical employees dominated the international migration flows (Garchitorea, 2007). Table 2 reveals that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the predominant post-2015 country destinations. The Philippines has played a significant role in providing the demand for specialised labour in non-domestic sectors due to increased state intervention in international migration management. Republic Act 8042 of 1995 established various priority programmes for return migrants through the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). These programmes provide social services and protection for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and their families until reintegration. Furthermore, NGOs, community organisations, and churches play various roles in supporting the rights of migrants. The government expands opportunities for OFWs who wish to implement their concepts abroad as individuals or through myriad organisations.

**Table 2. Country destination of OFWs**

Countries	2015	2016	2017	2018
Hong Kong	5,9	5,6	11,7	6,3
Japan	3,5	3,5	3,2	3,3
Taiwan	4,5	5,2	4,5	5,5
Other East Asia	2,8	3,6	2,3	3,7
Malaysia	3,3	2,1	1,8	2,4
Singapore	5,7	5,6	6,1	4,9
Southeast and South Asia	2	2,5	1,7	1,7
Kuwait	5,8	6,4	10,3	5,7
Qatar	5,5	6,2	5,1	5,2
Saudi Arabia	24,7	23,8	22,5	24,3
United Arab Emirates	15,5	15,9	17,5	15,7
West Asia	4,7	4,6	5,9	4,0
Australia	1,6	1,4	0,9	2,1
Europe	7,1	6,6	3,1	7,8
United States	6,1	5,6	3,2	6,6
Others	0,1	*	-	-

Sources: Compiled from the Philippines Statistical Authority's database<sup>3</sup>

Table 3 shows that basic occupations continue to dominate OFWs' job types. However, the professional, technical, and commercial sectors are also substantial. Since professional employees and skilled workers have greater access to various locations, it can be said that they have a deeper understanding of state administration and public policy. Their higher

literacy enables them to interpret the political situation through regular exposure to various media, even if they do not actively participate in political organisations in the destination country. In some democratic nations, they can even directly form or join unions and receive political education from NGOs and institutions.

**Table 3. Types of occupation of OFWs**

Job	2015	2016	2017	2018
Manager		2,4	1,8	1,5
Professional		13,6	12,1	11,5
Technician	9	9,6	11,3	
Clerical		4,7	3,1	4
Sales		18	15,6	16,1
Skill Workers in Forestry and Fishing	0,1	0,2	0,1	
Craft and Trading		14,7	12,4	12,7
Machine Operator	15,8	18,7	18,5	
Domestic		21,9	26,3	24,3

Sources: Compiled from the Philippines Statistical Authority's database<sup>4</sup>

One of the migration-sending areas in the Philippines is Mabini City in Batangas Province. Since the early 1970s, people from this city began migrating to work overseas. Some of them worked as nurses in the United States and Germany, as well as construction workers in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. In the 1990s, when social networks of migrants began to be established to facilitate the sending of

workers to countries such as Italy, Singapore, Spain, and Israel, the number of migrants doubled. These migrants primarily work in the domestic sector in Italy, as professionals such as nurses and engineers in other countries, and as semi-skilled industrial workers in third-world countries. In 2007, NGOs and citizen collective movements began to emerge in Mabini. The local government also allowed residents and their

<sup>3</sup> <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos>

<sup>4</sup> <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos>

organisations to participate in urban development. Citizens' institutions and organisations are accredited and actively participate in government-organised meetings (Basa et al., 2009). One of the women's organisations, *Samahan ng Kababaihan*, meets regularly at the local legislature. Furthermore, public participation in monitoring policy change is organised through various democratic means focused on electoral and advocacy.

The Mabini phenomenon did not appear overnight. Initially, informal ties between migrants and their families barely touched on political issues. Migrants are only concerned with providing economic support to their families and maintaining ties to their extended family in the Philippines (Rafael, 1996). However, the destination country of the migrants plays a critical role in determining their political remittances. Also, the educational background of migrants is critical to determine the extent of political remittances. For example, educated migrants are more compelled to stay permanently in the destination country. Although some educated individuals are motivated to return to their hometowns and assume leadership positions, most do not possess this orientation.

The political remittances sent by OFWs are reflected in values, ideas, and new ways of life introduced to the regions of origin. However, these things might clash with local traditions and customs. Furthermore, social media platforms are critical to transmitting political remittances, as they can act as means of political discourse and outreach without face-to-face mobilisation. Consequently, the migrant elite must understand the nature of various associations among migrants, including those with a transformative spirit. Elites are expected to mediate differences in origin areas, ranging from differences in social class, economy, and culture (Ong & Cabañes, 2011). If OFWs cannot foster cohesion in their host country, political remittances in the country of origin can accelerate.

In general, the OFWs' case shows that opportunities to develop political remittances in countries of origin are highly attributed to the high number of migrants who work in democratic countries. However, this situation can only be realised with the following preconditions: their interaction in destination countries and their levels of education. Political remittances include specialised labour with a relatively high level of education, a diploma or degree, and a climate or healthy interaction environment in the destination country.

### **Migrants in Indonesia**

In 1890, the Dutch East Indies colonial government began to send employees from Indonesia to Suriname as part of a programme to send workers abroad. Up until 1939, a total of 32,000 individuals were employed in the plantation industry. After its independence, the Indonesian government's involvement in sending employees overseas began with the issue of the *AKAN (Antar Kerja Antar Negara)* programme, as regulated in PP No. 4/1970. With the establishment of the National Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI or *Badan Nasional Penempatan dan Perlindungan Tenaga Kerja Indonesia*) in 2004, Law No. 39/2004 on the Placement and Protection of Workers Abroad came into effect. According to Law No. 18 of 2017, BNP2TKI is now the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI or *Badan Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia*). Due to the high rate of violence against Indonesian migrant workers (PMIs or *Pekerja Migran Indonesia*) in the Middle East, the government issued a ban in 2015 on sending PMIs to work in the domestic sector. Some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, were prohibited from accepting Indonesian workers as permanent residents (Noveria, 2017).

**Table 4. Country destination of PMIs**

Country	2015	2016	2017	2018
Malaysia	35,45	37,37	33,85	31,97
Taiwan	27,31	32,88	23,90	25,52
Hong Kong	5,56	6,16	26,32	26,06
Singapore	7,58	7,55	5,09	6,46
Saudi Arabia	8,34	5,77	2,46	2,08
Brunei Darussalam	3,62	3,48	2,52	2,01
South Korea	2,00	2,52	1,42	2,43
United Arab Emirates	2,76	1,10	0,63	0,26
Oman	2,45	0,43	0,41	0,26
Qatar	0,89	0,58	0,39	0,21
United States	0,37	0,11	0,12	0,02
Bahrain	0,93	0,05	0,05	0,03
Italy	0,55	0,36	0,38	0,42
Kuwait	0,08	0,42	0,44	0,41
Turkiye	0,40	0,21	0,31	0,35
Japan	0,17	0,03	0,20	0,16
Spain	0,10	0,05	0,05	0,02
China	0,04	0,03	0,03	0,01
South Afrika	0,04	0,01	0,07	0,02
Thailand	0,26	0,04	0,00	0,00
Others	1,32	0,88	1,35	1,29

Sources: Compiled from various sources<sup>5</sup>

Malaysia and Taiwan are the most popular destinations for PMI, followed by Hong Kong in recent years (Table 4). Meanwhile, PMI in Middle Eastern countries began to decrease due to the restrictive policy of sending PMI to these countries. The major destination countries, such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, share a long history of liberal democracy due to the influence of the United States and Britain. Later, when Hong Kong rejoined the PRC, the question of limiting democracy arose.

Most PMI employees, such as domestic housekeepers, operators, and plantation workers, are unskilled or low-skilled. Consequently, PMI has less access to middle-class circulation and less time to socialise with the larger community. On average, less than 10% of remittances are used as business capital, and families rarely receive financial benefits from family members working abroad (Noveria, 2017; Romdiati et al., 2002).

The government has supported the participation of NGOs in empowering migrants to use financial remittances for economic turnover so

that they do not have to return to work abroad. However, the government's intervention in the empowering programme of migrants is still focused on economic growth. BNP2TKI, a government agency specialising in PMI management, routinely conducts entrepreneurship programmes or partners with specific businesses to provide financial management training for return migrants. Also, in PMI enclaves in East Java, the regional government has PMI service organisations that assist migrants from pre-departure to post-migration to develop their businesses in their origin areas. Migrants are expected to be able to manage their income while working abroad to revitalise the local economy.

Table 5 shows that most PMIs worked as domestic workers and household nurses, followed by factory operators and plantation workers. With this employment structure, PMIs have less access to middle-class associations and fewer opportunities to adopt a more systematic approach to political issues. However, in some cases in Hong Kong and Taiwan, which are democratic and open countries, PMIs can

<sup>5</sup> <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2019/07/30/2014-maret-2019-penempatan-pekerja-migran-capai-155-juta>; <https://bp2mi.go.id/statistik-penempatan>; <https://satudata.kemnaker.go.id/data/kumpulan-data>



participate in various public activities. Although their participation has not been able to cultivate a broader political awareness, such as government administration and the importance of citizen participation in politics, this situation has significantly impacted migrants' lifestyles. Moreover, few PMIs are employed in

professional and managerial sectors or jobs requiring high education levels. Therefore, political remittances that can catalyse change in the country of origin can be challenging to implement.

**Table 5. Types of occupation of PMIs**

Job	2015	2016	2017	2018
Domestic	22,13	19,79	36,53	32,83
Nurse	18,78	23,10	16,75	18,12
Machine Operator	12,76	13,82	11,93	12,69
Plantation Workers	13,97	13,15	10,07	8,85
General Workers	7,37	11,91	9,09	9,40
Construction	1,79	1,22	0,70	0,72
Clerical	2,48	1,60	0,61	0,52
Others	20,73	15,42	14,32	16,87

Sources: Compiled from various sources<sup>6</sup>

In Indonesia, NGOs are essential to provide migrants with services to improve their quality of life. However, they have limitations in administering financial transfers and protecting PMI rights. Migrant Care is one of the foremost NGOs advocating for migrant policy. Their MAMPU programme, which aims to improve poor women's access to essential public services, has facilitated local organisations in enclaves of migrants' origin areas. SARI (Social Analysis and Research Institute), Bumi Karya Mandiri in Kuripan Watumalang Village, Migrant Bijak Mergosari in Mergosari Sukoharjo Village, and MUIWO (Migrant United Indonesia Wonosobo) in Lipursari Village are some of the local organisations. In addition, Migrant Care initiated the Migrant Worker Care Village Programme (DESBUMI or *Desa Peduli Buruh Migran*). This programme is part of a local initiative to provide comprehensive information on procedures, departure administration, access to protection in the destination country, and PMI contacts in their home village (Hutagalung & Indrio, 2019).

PMI women participated in various social empowerment activities, encouraging them to express their opinions and experiences during migration. They also received several pieces of training from migrant network organisations.

Local organisation *Indiapt Kebumen*, which manages the Migrant Worker Families Community (*Kabumi*), is an example of such organisations. Through an organised and permanent programme, PMIs can be directly involved in formulating policies at the village level and higher levels of government. In the Ponorogo Regency in East Java, an example of the political mobilisation of PMI can be observed through the candidacy of those with international migration experience to be village chiefs. In addition, PMIs in this regency also formed a Community of Indonesian Migrant Workers (KOPI or *Komunitas Pekerja Migran Indonesia*) in Pondok village that acts as a communication space between PMIs and other villagers to mitigate the issues faced by PMIs from this village.

In Sumbawa village, one of the PMI enclaves outside Java, a coalition of NGOs called *Koslata* offers training and assistance in financial and asset management to migrant families. Furthermore, in addition to participating in collectively organised policy advocacy, several PMIs are personally involved in politics<sup>7</sup>. Their involvement results from the mentoring process carried out by NGOs, as evidenced in the success story of a PMI who became a legislative member

6 <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2019/07/30/2014-maret-2019-penempatan-pekerja-migran-capai-155-juta>; <https://bp2mi.go.id/statistik-penempatan>; <https://satudata.kemnaker.go.id/data/kumpulan-data>  
7 <https://buruhmigran.or.id/2018/12/25/dari-pekerja-migran-hingga-kepala-desa-dua-periode/>

in the East Lombok Regency<sup>8</sup>. The viability of advocacy and assistance programmes conducted by various NGOs is highly dependent on the nature of the programme and the situation in PMI enclaves. The relationships between NGOs and PMI groups are mainly based on affiliations, with NGOs continuing to offer advice and assistance as needed. Not all local NGOs can survive in this situation since their integration into national or international NGO programmes remains relatively low. This indicates their limited ability to influence policy changes substantially.

At various administrative levels, the Indonesian government significantly emphasises the economic empowerment of migrants and their families. This emphasis is due to the recognition of inadequate financial remittance management, which hinders the establishment of productive enterprises. In contrast, NGOs demonstrate a greater interest in promoting the dissemination of knowledge about the rights and protection of migrants. Indeed, these disparities can serve as complementary actions, enhancing migrants' ability to secure optimal protection and acquire practical financial management skills, thus preventing the squandering of resources on consumptive expenditures.

### Political Remittances of Indonesia and the Philippines Migrant Workers

Based on previous discussions on the political aspects of return migration of OFWs and PMIs, Table 6 compares various aspects of political remittances between these two migrant groups. Regarding the value variable, migrants from Indonesia and the Philippines who send political remittances had worked in countries with open political conditions and liberal democratic models. When OFWs return to their origin areas, they play an active role in altering public policies, not only those related to the rights and safety of migrants but also other public issues related to social welfare, infrastructure, and the economic sector. Furthermore, the reintegration of migrants is an agenda taken seriously in the Philippines because it plays an important role in ensuring the appropriate management of financial remittances and achieving economic independence for migrants and their families. Meanwhile, PMIs and their organisations are not explicitly concerned with public policy beyond the issue of legal protection for migrants.

**Table 6. Comparison of political remittance between OFWs and PMIs**

Variable	Indicator	OFWs	PMIs
Value	Political openness	Open	Open
	Democratic principle	Liberal	Liberal
	Public policy orientation	Yes	No
Network	National and International NGOs	Strong local NGOs	National NGOs dominance
	Political party	Low engagement	Low engagement
	Local government	Fully support	Depend on
	Private sector	Active	Passive
	Community	Organised	Sporadic
Action	Policy advocacy	All interest	Limited to migrant protection
	Civic forum	Institutionalised	Exist
	Party management	Individual	Individual
	Partnership with government	Local and national	National
	Community development	Stable	Less stable

Government interventions in the Philippines can also be seen in issues related to the stability of the lives of return migrants. The government conducts migrant reintegration programmes by actively involving families and communities. In Batangas province, this programme cultivates

social capital through interventions by various levels of government to ensure that migrants can integrate into their social network again after leaving the area for an extended period (Zamora, 2021). Integrative services can be seen in a 'one-stop' service provided by the Mabini city

<sup>8</sup> <http://regional.kompas.com/read/2015/02/13/01031751/Mantan.TKW.Sukses.Jadi.Dewan.di.Lombok.Timur>.

government, the Batangas provincial government, and the Atikha NGO. This service helps left-behind migrant families, from providing information about the latest situation of families working abroad to protecting children and parents at home.

Through the National Reintegration Centre for OFWs (NRCO) and the OWWA, the Manila government runs a reintegration programme that connects return migrants with the private sector and financial institutions to address their economic problems. For example, NRCO designed a small-scale business programme that involved various companies in helping sell products in the community. Relevant ministries also assist according to their fields, ranging from agriculture to bank loans (Ang & Tiongson, 2023; Opiniano, 2021). This cross-stakeholder synergy programme can make migrants more resilient to financial vulnerabilities and minimise bad risks to their families. Reintegration also provides greater opportunities for migrants to maintain a connection with the community and does not cause alienation when starting new activities in the area.

The community organisation is carried out by encouraging the participation of local NGOs using cultural modalities. An interesting example can be seen in Pulong Anahao village, known as 'little Italy' because many of its inhabitants migrated to Italy. Their choice of destination country was mainly due to the similarity of religion. Strong evidence of 'emotional remittances' is shown through traditions and culture brought from the destination country to be applied in local communities (Katigbak, 2013). The transmission of cultural knowledge by migrants impacts changing landscapes, ranging from the architecture of houses of worship to economic and trade networks.

This study also found that networks can optimise migrants' agendas in their homelands. In Indonesia, migrant networks have a unitary government structure. Jakarta is primarily responsible for mainstreaming PMI issues. Therefore, many issues of migrant protection are voiced by national NGOs. They also have more access to central government and bureaucratic

issues related to migrants' dispatch. Several local PMI communities sponsored by a national non-profit organisation can be found in some PMI enclaves. However, organisations tend to be sporadic and do not last long. Migrant Care and the Indonesian Migrant Workers' Union are two prominent national-level NGOs facilitating partnerships and networks of PMIs at local levels. Initially, the focus of the two NGOs was limited to the advocacy of migrant workers by the Indonesian government and destination countries. Their programmes provide direct training to local migrant organisations on the legal, procedural, and mitigation aspects of emergency cases, such as workplace violence abroad. Meanwhile, a robust local NGO network can be found in the Philippines. Rather than relying on the national NGO programme, OFW-sending regions are more concerned with strengthening social networks on a domestic scale. This situation enables OFW to substantially influence public policy formulation through networks with local governments, the private sector, and communities.

In the action variable, PMIs have a communication channel through citizen forums, but it is not institutionalised due to the instability in community development. Only the national government, through the Ministry of Labour and BP2MI, can control the central and regional policies related to PMIs, so that less support can be observed from the local government. However, local governments in a few areas have the initiative to partner with the PMI organisation. On the other hand, OFWs have a formalised citizen forum that supports various public policy advocacy activities. The forum contributed to various government and private supports. This situation gives OFWs greater bargaining power when a party or candidate seeks support.

Migrant activities have become increasingly prominent in destination countries, particularly democratic ones such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, various migrant empowerment initiatives had different levels of success (Sim, 2009). Initiatives that contribute to developing awareness and courage among migrants have allowed them to establish associations and

express their thoughts openly and directly. In Hong Kong, the Indonesian Workers Association (ATKI or *Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia*) was established in the 2000s, with members primarily employed in the domestic sector. In 2001, they exhibited their audacity by disseminating their resolute stance against exploitation, employment agencies, and the Indonesian government (Constable, 2009). Regrettably, upon returning, they find themselves in an altered socio-political context, limiting their agency and freedoms. This finding demonstrates that the structural constraints imposed by different political structures have significantly affected the limited participation in advocacy and political activities of return migrants on a broader scale.

## CONCLUSIONS

Studies on political remittances in the Philippines and Indonesia demonstrate that the presence of international migrants contributes to policy transformation in their home countries. This article illustrates that return migrants can potentially transform the knowledge or awareness acquired in the destination country on a small scale. In addition, the situation in the areas of origin becomes a critical factor in determining how the knowledge and capacity of migrants can drive transformation. This article also shows that Filipino migrant workers play a more significant role in using their political remittances than their Indonesian counterparts. The democratic political system in the Philippines allows migrants to participate actively in policy advocacy arenas, including municipal elections. However, Indonesian migrants and NGOs are more involved in the campaign to protect the rights of international migrants.

Optimising political remittances requires state support in protecting private sectors in developing financial remittances, strong local NGOs, and facilitation from local governments. However, their respective supporting networks highly affect their actions' efficacy. More research is needed to explain the relationship between the life of international migrants in destination countries and the various transformations in their country of origin.

Similarly, additional research is required to investigate political remittances as assets that can be developed to facilitate the transformation of larger political values, such as democracy.

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