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Political Parties Abroad. A New Arena for Electoral Politics

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ABSTRACT

This Special Issue contributes to the growing literature on parties abroad. Expansive citizenship has transformed and reinforced the civic and political links between emigrants and their home country. Political parties face the dilemma of engaging or not in this new arena for electoral politics and must consider how. However, until recently the literature on transnationalism and on party politics has surprisingly largely overlooked this issue. This introduction identifies the existing gaps in the literature, and stresses two main questions that remains largely unanswered, namely (1) why and how parties decide to campaign abroad, and (2) how voters abroad are receptive to these campaigns and operate their party choice in this specific context. The five articles offer a mix of case studies and comparative perspective, and quantitative and qualitative analyses. This case selection allows to explore the diversity of strategies adopted by political parties abroad in different settings, with different tools. The results illustrate the impact of local party branches and entrepreneurs' outreach and local campaigns on mobilisation, turnout, and the result of elections, but also show that emigrants' vote choice is influenced both by the context of their country of origin and of their country of residence.

KEYWORDS

Political parties; voting abroad; emigration; transnationalism; electoral campaign

Introduction

Globalisation processes have put the issue of citizenship and political rights back on the agenda (Arrighi & Bauböck, 2017). In a worldwide trend of 'expansive citizenship' (Bauböck, 2005), a majority of countries have extended the political rights of non-national residents on the national territory, and of national emigrants¹ residing abroad (Finn, 2020; Lafleur, 2013; Safran, 1997). In the last 30 years, the number of countries granting voting rights to non-resident citizens has dramatically increased (from 31 to 149 between 1989 and 2019), especially after 2000 (Brand, 2010, 2014; Caramani & Grotz, 2015; Collyer, 2014a).² By the end of the 2010s, most democracies, but also authoritarian states or countries in democratic transition, could claim some form of external voting, enabling emigrants to take part in the political life of their home country.³ In some instances, emigrants have been granted political representation in dedicated institutions and sixteen countries, including five Member States of the European Union, have even provisioned the right for their emigrants to directly elect members of parliament in

constituencies abroad (Bauböck, 2018; Burgess & Tyburski, 2020; Collyer, 2014b; Ellis et al., 2007; Makkonen, 2021; Østergaard-Nielsen & Camatarri, 2022; Palop-García et al., 2019). Millions of citizens experience these new rights, come election time (Meseguer & Burgess, 2014), with important electoral and political consequences (Bauböck, 2003, 2005). Indeed, external voting has effects on homeland public opinion, politics and elections (Gamlen, 2015; Malet, 2022; Meseguer & Burgess, 2014), and may even sometimes weigh on the outcome of elections, as in Romania in 2009 (Bureau, 2011) or in Italy in 2006 (Laguerre, 2013). This extension of voting and representation rights to residents abroad and its consequences represent opportunities and challenges for political parties. They face the dilemma of engaging or not in this new arena of electoral politics. If they do get involved, they need to consider how.

Given their significance, these reforms have generated an increasing body of literature. However, until recently this literature has surprisingly largely overlooked the issue of their implications for political parties and their role in a new arena of electoral politics. This Special Issue contributes to fill this gap. Our main goal is to investigate (1) why and how parties decide to campaign abroad, and (2) how voters abroad are receptive to these campaigns and operate their party choice in this specific context. In doing so, it contributes to a better understanding of the most recent transformations of democracy and representation.

Defining Parties Abroad

Van Haute and Kernalegenn (2020) offer a first classification of parties abroad, based on two criteria: their relation to the home country, that can be more or less conflictual, and the location of their headquarters, that can be in the home country or outside of it. *Emigrant party branches* are parties with non-conflictual relation with the home country and with headquarters in the home country. In other words, they are extraterritorial branches of a mother party. *Diaspora or anti-diaspora parties* have conflictual relations with the home country with headquarters in the home country. Their goal is to coordinate the diaspora in favour or against home country politics. *Emigrant parties* are parties with non-conflictual relation with the home country but with headquarters abroad. They mobilise followers with an emigrant background and defend their interests. Finally, *forbidden parties* have conflictual relations with the home country with headquarters abroad. They mostly function in dictatorial contexts, when party life is impossible in the home country and is therefore maintained abroad.

This Special issue focusses on emigrant party branches, that is, parties that have roots in non-conflictual, emigrant politics (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003) and have developed some forms of organisation and activities abroad.

Studying Parties Abroad

The literature on emigration and citizenship was the first to focus on the development of external voting rights and representation. Authors have discussed the normative implications of these developments for citizenship (Bauböck, 2003; Rhodes & Harutyunyan, 2010), and analysed system-level explanatory factors for the (non-)expansion of political rights of emigrants (Bauböck, 2005; Caramani & Grotz, 2015; Hartmann, 2015;

Hutcheson & Arrighi, 2015; Jaulin, 2016; Lafleur, 2015; Margheritis, 2022; Østergaard-Nielsen et al., 2019; Pallister, 2020; Palop-García et al., 2019; Reidy, 2021; Turcu & Urbatsch, 2020; Umpierrez de Reguero et al., 2021; Wellman, 2021).

This literature shows how these reforms enable emigrants to engage in various types of political participation (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Tsuda, 2012), both formally and informally (Bermudez, 2010), in their host country and their country of origin (Chaudhary & Moss, 2019; Finn, 2020; Morales & Pilati, 2014). While the literature on electoral participation and representation of national migrants as immigrants in their host country has developed earlier (Bilodeau et al., 2010; Bird et al., 2015), similar works on emigrants and their homeland took off more recently but is rapidly expanding.

First, scholars have analysed emigrant turnout in homeland elections and its determinants. They have stressed the low turnout among emigrants compared to national residents (Battiston & Luconi, 2020). Among the explanatory factors for this low turnout, most studies focus on macro- or micro-level factors. Institutions in the home country matter: turnout decreases with strict registration rules and difficult access to information (Escobar et al., 2015), in person voting opposed to internet voting or voting by proxy or by post (Belchior et al., 2018; Germann, 2021; Hutcheson & Arrighi, 2015), and undemocratic regime at home (Belchior et al., 2018; Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020), while state-led outreach and the existence of emigrant institutions have a mobilising effect (Burgess, 2018; Koinova & Tsourapas, 2018). Institutions in the host country also play a role, but conclusions are not clear. For instance, Chaudhary (2018) shows that turnout among emigrants is lower in host countries with solid democratic institutions and inclusive and accessible national and local political opportunity structures, pointing to a trade-off between transnational engagements (Peltoniemi, 2018). Other authors show that emigrant living in countries with higher level of democracy and better living conditions are more easily mobilised to vote (Ahmadov & Sasse, 2016; Belchior et al., 2018; Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020). Still at the macro level, historical linkages and proximity between the home and the host country, for instance in the form of post-colonial ties, increase turnout (Chaudhary, 2018; Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020). Geographical proximity and socio-economic factors also matter: emigration density and population stability, phone access in the host country and high levels of remittances increase turnout (Burgess, 2014; Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020; Dandoy & Kernalegenn, 2021). Finally, higher levels of competitiveness and turnout in homeland elections are associated with higher turnout among emigrants (Chaudhary, 2018; Dandoy & Kernalegenn, 2021), but not always (Belchior et al., 2018). At the individual level, studies have emphasised that emigrants with higher levels of resources (age, gender, education) have a higher probability to vote in homeland elections, very much like national residents (Burgess, 2014; Guarnizo et al., 2019; McIlwaine & Bermudez, 2015; Mügge et al., 2021). The country of birth and the length of residency in the host country also play a role (Peltoniemi, 2018; Szulecki et al., 2021): studies point to a decline in participation with length of residence abroad (Belchior et al., 2018; Waldinger, 2012). Studies show that interest in home country politics as well as previous political experience in the home country increases the likelihood of voting (Lafleur & Chelius, 2011; McCann et al., 2019; McIlwaine & Bermudez, 2015; Peltoniemi, 2018), yet higher cost of voting, distance to polling station (Peltoniemi, 2018), and higher perceived cost of voting, decrease the probability to vote (Maminskaitė, 2022; McIlwaine &

Bermudez, 2015; Wass et al., 2021), confirming findings at the aggregate level. Participation in homeland elections is also driven by a sense of duty, patriotism, homesickness, and a desire to reproduce a social milieu abroad (Boccagni, 2011; Boccagni & Ramirez, 2013; Knott, 2017; McCann et al., 2019).

Second, scholars have started to investigate the determinants of external vote choice. Studies stress that differences in vote choices between emigrants and national residents can be attributed to compositional effects, with emigrants presenting different profiles in terms of resources and social class (Goldberg & Lanz, 2021; Lawson, 2003; Mügge et al., 2021). But this is only part of the story. Goldberg and Lanz (2021) show that there are also behavioural differences: emigrants' vote choice would be more driven by class and religious beliefs, and less by partisanship or issues than national residents. While the homeland political identity would prevail due to early socialisation, emigrants would develop new, transnational identities and attitudes vis-à-vis the home country, including attitudes towards democracy and the political system (Ahmadov & Sasse, 2015; Battiston & Luconi, 2020; Jaulin, 2016).

However, this literature has tended to ignore the partisan dimension of external voting, rarely connecting it to the literature on electoral and party politics. Similarly, the fields of parties and electoral politics heavily focuses on the national level (Deschouwer, 2006). Despite a turning point denouncing the dominant methodological nationalism (Schakel & Jeffery, 2013) and the development of a literature focusing on political parties in multi-level contexts (Detterbeck, 2012), it still largely ignores the extra-territorial dimension of party and electoral politics.

It is only recently that a burgeoning literature has begun to focus on the partisan dimension of emigrant politics (Kernalegenn & Van Haute, 2020; Rashkova, 2020). Studies started to investigate why parties support (or not) external voting rights and how, more broadly, they tackle emigrant issues (Østergaard-Nielsen et al., 2019). We also see some research emerging on the organisational development of parties abroad, as well as studies on their role and functions (Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021; Friedman & Kenig, 2021; Gauja, 2020; Gherghina & Soare, 2020b; Jakobson et al., 2021; Kernalegenn & Pellen, 2020; Piccio, 2020; Siotos, 2020; Uekami et al., 2020; von Nostitz, 2021).

Regarding more specifically the electoral function of parties abroad (Borz, 2020; Jakobson et al., 2020; Kalu & Scarrow, 2020), these new research have started to stress the (non-) mobilising role of parties in the electoral process (Burgess, 2018; Burgess & Tyburski, 2020; Fliess, 2021; Paarlberg, 2020a), finding that the involvement of homeland parties among emigrants is the most relevant factor in explaining their turnout in homeland elections (Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020). We see some pioneer work on external campaigning by parties abroad that look at the incentives and strategies developed to engage in campaigns abroad, and how parties' organisational structures facilitate or hinder this engagement (Østergaard-Nielsen & Ciornei, 2019; Paarlberg, 2019). Some authors (see Umpierrez de Reguero & Dandoy, 2020) have also started to analyse the electoral performances of parties abroad and their determinants (Umpierrez de Reguero & Dandoy, 2020).

However, our knowledge is still very limited about why and how parties decide to campaign abroad, and how voters abroad are receptive to these campaigns and

operate their party choice in this specific context. This Special Issue contributes to fill this gap.

Empirical Basis of the Special Issue

To answer our research questions, the Special Issue adopts an inductive and comparative perspective. The SI mixes four case studies: Ecuador (Umpierrez de Reguero & Dandoy, 2021), France (Kernalegenn et al., 2021), Mexico (Paarlberg, 2020b), and Romania (Gherghina & Soare, 2020a) and one comparative paper focused on member states of the EU (Ognibene & Paulis, 2021). The papers were selected for their diversity and for their expected potential to investigate whether, why and how political parties abroad perform their electoral functions in this new arena abroad. The selected cases are characterised by differences in terms of legal frameworks and social and political contexts both at home (various electoral systems, with and without institutional provisions for representation for emigrants, European and non-European countries) and in the host country. In Ecuador, France, and Romania, emigrants have direct representation in the parliament of their home country, while in Mexico they don't. This is the strategy adopted in the classic theories of parties: comparing party organisations in different settings to highlight commonalities and to understand differences. Furthermore, two of the papers use quantitative methodologies while three papers mobilise qualitative tools. This case selection strategy allows to explore the diversity of strategies adopted by political parties abroad in different settings, with different tools.

Emigrant Party Branches as Actors of Campaigns and Elections Abroad

To investigate whether and why parties engage in their electoral functions abroad, this Special Issue focuses on contrasting cases.

Umpierrez de Reguero and Dandoy (2021) investigate the determinants of the entry of political parties in the three two-seats Ecuadorian overseas districts, explaining transnational party competition. They find that the decision to participate in elections in overseas districts often results from a cost-benefit calculation, and single out two main determinants. Parties are more likely to enter the electoral competition in districts (1) displaying a lower level of competitiveness and (2) where they have previous electoral experience. The authors also show that the characteristics of the districts and party ideologies do not impact the decision of parties to enter the competition.

On the contrary, Paarlberg (2020b) focuses on a case – Mexican emigrants in the U.S. – where parties fail in their role as vehicles for electoral campaigns among emigrants, notably due to legal restrictions. With extremely low voter turnout, outreach by Mexican parties is limited. While parties fail to build permanent party structures among emigrants, Mexican political engagement in the U.S. is mostly carried out by Hometown Associations. As Paarlberg concludes, Mexico presents a negative case of diaspora outreach by parties. However, this is instructive as well, and reinforces the idea that party branch infrastructures abroad are essential to carry out transnational electoral activities.

The remaining papers engage with the issue of how parties perform their electoral function abroad, in terms of campaigning and mobilisation, but also in terms of structuring vote choice.

Gherghina and Soare (2020a) analyse how Romanian political parties are established in countries hosting large numbers of Romanian emigrants. Romanian parties started to organise abroad in 2008, in link with the greater mobility made possible after the country's accession to the EU and the larger share of the electorate entitled to vote from abroad. However, they show that the geography of the establishment of parties remains unequal: emigrant party branches are mostly present in large European capitals, and not much beyond that. Importantly, all party branches abroad benefitted from a strong bottom-up dynamic and from the strategic role of political entrepreneurs and grassroots. While the mother party at home formalises their existence, the autonomy of branches abroad and the crucial role of local entrepreneurs is a persistent feature. Electoral politics among Romanians abroad has therefore a strong local component.

Kernalegenn et al. (2021) also stress the importance of the local dimension of electoral politics abroad. More specifically, they compare electoral campaigns in three of the constituencies for French abroad during the general election of 2017. They explain how differentiated and localised campaigns attuned to local political dynamics and the specific histories and sociologies of constituencies are not only possible but also a condition of electoral success. While campaign dynamics in the home country do matter abroad, localised campaigns abroad are essential, both online and offline. Indeed, they emphasise that electoral campaigning abroad is not necessarily de-territorialised: the whole range of campaign methods found in metropolitan France can also be found abroad.

The last paper, by Ognibene and Paulis (2021), analyses external voting choices from emigrants from six European countries (Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Poland, and Romania) who settled in 28 European countries (the 27 EU member States + the United Kingdom), using longitudinal electoral data (1995–2019). They demonstrate that if emigrants' vote choices in home country elections mostly reflect the political context of their country of origin (emigrants tend to produce voting patterns relatively similar to those who haven't left), it is also influenced by the political life of their country of residence. The voting behaviour of emigrants is not therefore fully transnational and can be influenced by the political parties of both their home and host nations.

This special issue therefore contributes to the literature by confirming, illustrating, and elaborating on existing hypotheses, such as the strong impact of parties' outreach and local campaigns on mobilisation, turnout, and the result of elections, or that emigrants' vote choice is influenced both by the context of their country of origin and of their country of residence. It also offers new angles, by bringing a qualitative dimension to the field, by asserting the need to focus on grassroots and local party branches and entrepreneurs, and by stressing the crucial role of previous political experience in the home country.

Notes

1. We use the concept of emigrants to designate all country nationals residing abroad, independent of the length of their stay, their status or motivation for emigration.

2. <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voting-abroad>, accessed 28/11/2022.
3. Only two full democracies (Malta and Uruguay) and five ‘flawed’ democracies (Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Taiwan and Trinidad and Tobago) have no provision for external voting as of 2019. We use the Democracy Index 2018 definition and may therefore have omitted micro-states excluded from that source. <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>, accessed 28/11/2022.

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Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed for the study.

Data Deposition

Data deposition is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed for the study.

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