

En Marche, French expatriates!

The booming emergence of a new political actor among French residents overseas in the 2017 elections

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One of the striking dimensions of Emmanuel Macron's rise to power in France in 2017 is that he enjoyed a particularly large support among the 1.3 million French overseas voters. He gathered 40.4% of the vote casted abroad in the first round of the presidential election (+16.4 points of percentage more than his national result) and 89.3% in the second round (+23.2 points of percentage more than his national result) even though he had never run for any office and his party was created only one year earlier. During the following general election, French emigrants¹ once again overwhelmingly backed the new President. The candidates supported by Macron's new party crushed the competition in the constituencies for French residents overseas. Although most of them were newcomers in politics, they won no less than 10 of the 11 expatriate seats in the National Assembly. Most of the incumbents experienced a severe defeat, in several cases by a margin of over 40 points of percentage more.

In this chapter, we seek to better understand Macron's spectacular electoral success among French voters living abroad through an analysis of the structuration of En Marche! (EM) out of France during the 2017 election campaign. This case study is of particular interest for at least two reasons. Firstly, it provides the rare opportunity to look in detail into a very recent process of party institutionalization (Panebianco 1988; Aït-Aoudia and Dezé 2011; Bolleyer and Bytzek 2013) and thus to better apprehend the specific challenges of setting up,

developing and organising party branches outside the national territory. Secondly, it enables to investigate the strong yet understudied relationship between French expatriates and French domestic politics (Pellen 2013; Collard 2013). Although the literature on transnational politics has been flourishing lately (Dufoix *et al.* 2010; Lafleur 2013; Collyer 2013), studies of French – and more broadly European – emigrants’ political involvement in their home country have so far remained rare.

This chapter contributes to filling that research gap by shedding light on the rise of EM as a prominent actor of the French political space that has emerged abroad in recent years. How did a political group that was created only a few months earlier succeed in gathering such a large audience among French emigrant voters? How did it organize on the ground to campaign overseas? How did it manage to marginalize other French political and associative organizations that were active abroad sometimes for decades? The chapter adopts a qualitative approach using a triangulation of sources, based on original fieldwork to investigate how EM strove to develop its structures and activities outside metropolitan France during the 2017 elections. Our research combines content analysis (party documents, social networks, websites and press articles), direct observation in different constituencies for French residents overseas (in Switzerland, Belgium, the USA and China) and semi-structured interviews with diplomats, representatives of expatriates and party activists (including 21 LREM activists abroad).²

The analysis is divided into three parts. First, we specify the features of the French political space abroad. Second, we examine the dynamics of the territorial diffusion of EM abroad during the Presidential election. Third, we discuss the attempts of the party’s national

leadership to increase its control over local committees over the course of the Parliamentary election campaign.

The emergence of a French political space abroad

French nationals living abroad represent an expatriate community endowed with a particularly great number of political rights in their home country (Garriaud-Maylam 2010; Collard 2013). In recent years, France's ambitious diaspora policies have favoured the gradual emergence of a distinctive French political space abroad. This space combines in original ways both national (i.e. imported from the French domestic context) and local (i.e. inspired from the local host states' context) issues and practices (Abélès 1988; Briquet and Sawicki 1989). In this section, we show that this extra-territorial political space has created new political opportunities for French political parties.

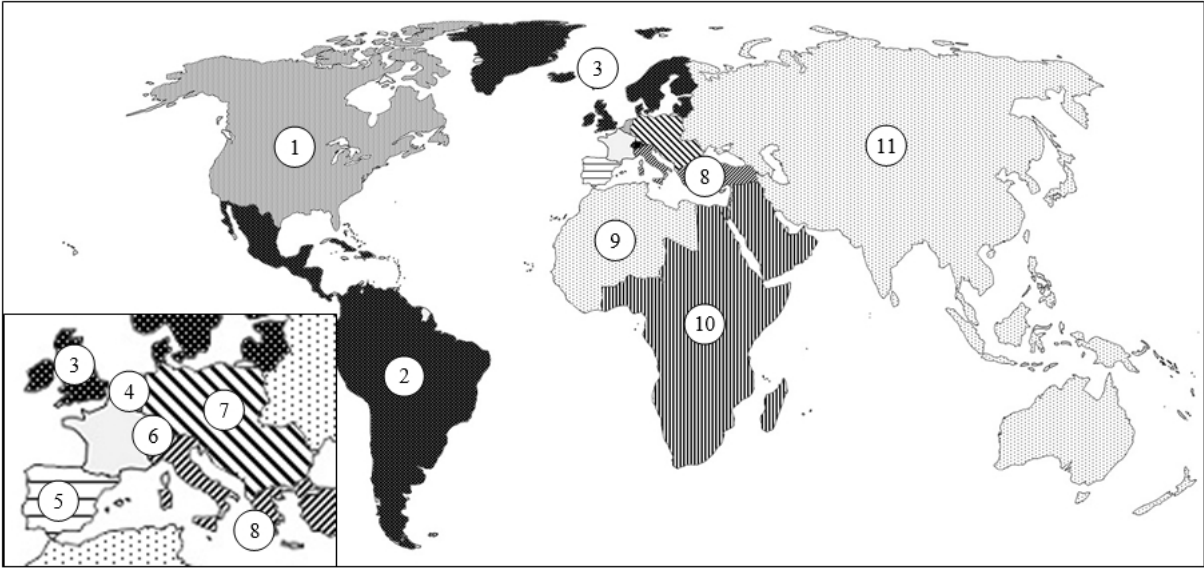
A substantial political representation of French emigrants

French emigrants retain the right to vote in every election and are allowed to vote in their country of residence (either in person or through proxy voting)³ for national referendums, presidential and European elections since 1976–1977, and Parliamentary elections since 2008. By exception to ordinary electoral rules, they can use remote voting by mail or the Internet in some cases.⁴

French citizens living abroad also benefit from a substantial political representation in their home country, one of the largest in the world (Collyer 2014). Firstly, since 1946 they are represented in the Senate, the upper house of the Parliament. The number of senators for French expatriates was originally set at three but was later increased to six in 1958, to nine in

1962 and eventually to 12 in 1983 (out of 348 senators in total). Secondly, a special political body was created in 1948 to advise the government on all the issues involving French nationals living outside France. The members of this *Conseil supérieur des Français de l'étranger* (High Council of French Citizens Abroad – CSFE), renamed *Assemblée des Français de l'étranger* (Assembly of French Citizens Abroad – AFE) in 2004, meets twice a year in plenary sessions in Paris. Thirdly, French emigrants were also granted a direct representation in the National Assembly – the lower house of the Parliament – in 2008. In the 2012 legislative election, French expatriates were called for the first time to elect 11 MPs (one per extra-territorial constituency).

Figure 1. The 11 constituencies for French residents overseas



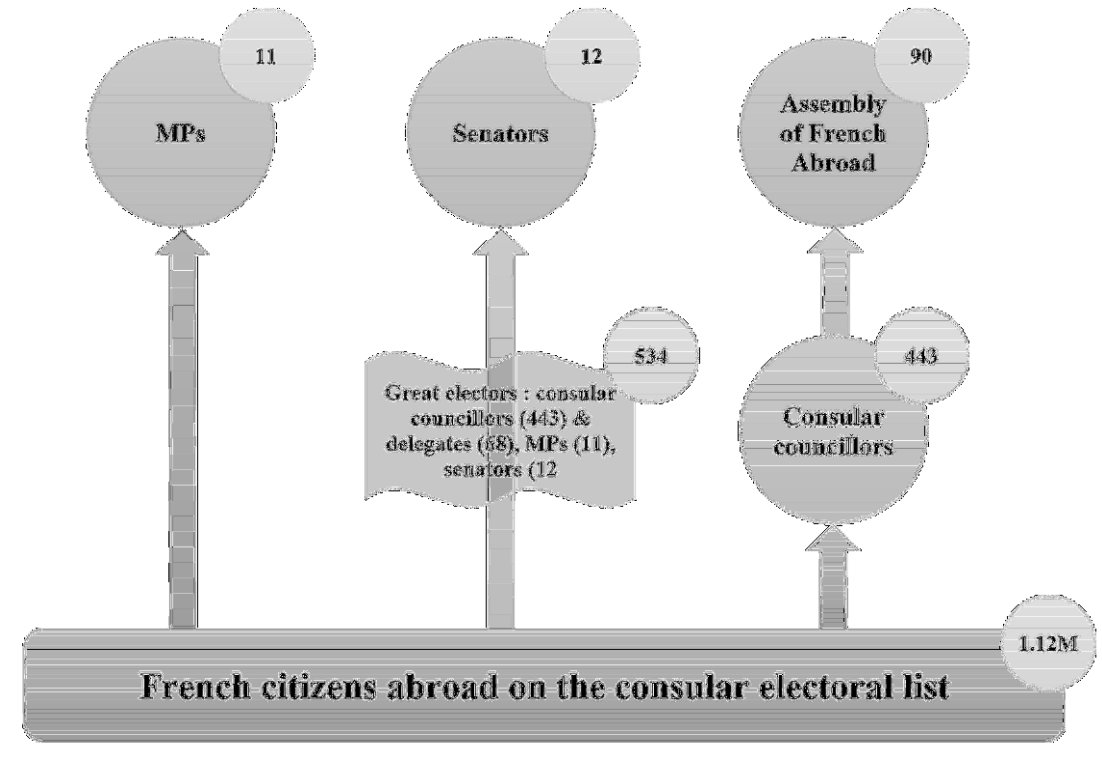
Source: Ordonnance n° 2009-935 of 29 July 2009.

Finally, 443 consular councillors were established in 2014. Those ‘local’ representatives are directly elected in 130 extra-territorial constituencies. They are members of consultative bodies aimed at advising the local consul and allocate education and social grants. After

having been directly elected by French residents abroad from 1982 to 2014, the 90 members of the AFE are now chosen by, and among, consular councillors.

In order to keep their electorate informed of their activities, the representatives of French expatriates are allowed to make use of the *Liste Électorale Consulaire* (Consular Electoral Register – LEC). This register gathers the personal postal and email addresses of every French citizen enrolled to vote abroad. In electoral times, candidates can also make use of the register to send electoral propaganda.

Figure 2. The system of political representation for French residents abroad



Source: Kernalegenn 2017.

The actors of the French political space abroad

Special representation and enfranchisement of citizens living overseas have favoured the emergence of a French political space abroad (Kernalegenn et al. 2018). Different groups of actors have gradually developed competitive activities specifically aimed at mobilizing and representing French emigrants in the French political system (Pellen 2013). The oldest of those actors are the associations of French expatriates, most notably the right wing *Union des Français de l'Étranger* (Union of French Abroad – UFE) established in 1927 and the left-wing *Français du monde – Association démocratique des Français à l'étranger* (French of the World/ Democratic Association of French Abroad – FdM/ADFE) launched in 1980 (Vivien and Raunet 1997). Although they both claim to be politically neutral, UFE and FdM/ADFE have always hosted activities that are essentially designed with an eye to French political parties and institutions.

Following the introduction of the direct election of CSFE's members in 1982, several French parties began to establish branches overseas. Yet, prior to the election of the first deputies for French living abroad in 2012, only the right-wing *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (Union for a Popular Movement – UMP) and the left-wing *Parti Socialiste* (Socialist Party – PS) had established significant, albeit limited, local structures abroad; mostly thanks to their proximity with associations of French expatriates. Since then, all main French parties have strived to develop branches abroad, albeit with unequal geographical presence.

Finally, it is worth noting that a third kind of actors also played a significant role in the emergence of a French political space abroad: the French community media. In addition to French national newspapers, TV channels and radio stations, which are now easily available outside France, several French-language media specifically aimed at providing local news to

French emigrants have recently been launched. While most have a limited geographical scope, such as *French Morning* in Northern America, or *Trait d'Union* in China, the news-site *lepetitjournal.com* has developed local editions worldwide since 2001. These community media have proven to be instrumental in enabling French expatriates to get information on what is going on in their extra-territorial constituency and thus, more broadly, in getting to know better the framework and actors of French emigrant politics.

The limits of the political space abroad

The French political space that has emerged abroad in recent years remains much more loosely structured than the French national political space or than other regional political spaces on the French territory.

Firstly, the interest of a majority of French citizens living abroad for French politics remains rather low. Notwithstanding the fact that most French laws don't apply directly to them, many of them have left France for years and have not kept strong connections with their country of origin. Some were even born abroad and got access to French citizenship only thanks to their parents. It is therefore not surprising that voter turnout in French elections is systematically much lower abroad than in metropolitan France (it was on average 30% lower in 2017).

Secondly, French emigrants in their host country do not organize in strong communities that maintain close ties to their homeland. There are no homogenous 'French neighbourhoods' properly speaking in foreign cities and, although associations of French expatriates have existed for decades, the size of their membership has always been rather low. Similarly, French schools and French institutes do not either provide a strong sense of community to

French residents overseas. They mainly reach wealthy expatriates with children and are directed at a public that is not solely composed of emigrants.

Thirdly, the relative looseness of the French political space abroad can also be explained by political factors. Available elective mandates are limited in number and constraining in their practice. On the one hand, only 23 mandates are full-time position in politics (12 mandates of senator and 11 of deputy). All the other associative or political activists abroad, including consular councillors and members of the AFE, contribute on a voluntary basis, with only limited compensation for their expenses. On the other hand, it is often much harder for representatives of French expatriates to articulate the local and national scales of their political activity than for their metropolitan counterparts. Their constituencies are much larger and further away from Paris. Besides, their voters are scattered throughout large territories and among domestic populations. Finally, given that their constituencies are under the jurisdiction of other states, the representatives of French citizens abroad have only few levers of influence to make a difference on their voters' daily life. As a consequence of these specific constraints, most of them have faced major difficulties in establishing a strong representational link with their constituents and in combining their personal and professional lives with political commitment (Pellen 2017). Up to now, only very few have managed to pursue an enduring political career in the French institutional or party system.

The bottom-up structuration of En Marche! abroad

In this section, we show that the loose structuration of the French political space abroad proved to be an asset for the early development of Emmanuel Macron's new party overseas during the 2017 Presidential election. Building on a reputation of modernity, innovation and autonomy, EM managed within a few months to establish local committees all over the globe

and to attract much more supporters abroad than any other French party. The human and organizational resources gathered enabled Emmanuel Macron to lead a very active election campaign outside France.

A swift territorial diffusion outside France

On 6 April 2016, when Emmanuel Macron announced the creation a new political movement, he made no mention of the possibility of developing it abroad. Yet, some expatriates rapidly decided to create local groups in foreign countries. By 4 October 2016, when Macron held EM's first important rally in Strasbourg, dozens of extra-territorial committees had already been established in the cities with the largest French emigrant communities, like London, Brussels, Geneva or Montreal. The number of EM committees abroad rocketed up after Macron officially declared bid for presidency in November 2016. According to Richard Ferrand, its then secretary general, the movement could count early January 2017 on 9,000 emigrant members gathered in 270 committees in 70 different foreign countries⁵. In the aftermath of the general elections, the leadership of the movement claimed to have a membership abroad of about 25,000 distributed in 474 committees and 110 countries⁶. For the sake of comparison, right after the 2012 parliamentary election, the then victorious PS estimated its membership overseas to only 2,000, distributed in 60 party sections.⁷ It is necessary to specify that to be considered as a member of EM, one just has to register online, without having to pay any membership fees.

The swift expansion of EM's structure outside France in the early stage of the presidential campaign clearly satisfied Macron's concern to maximize support among the 1.3 million French voters living abroad. Yet it would be an analytical mistake to regard the creation of hundreds of local committees abroad as the sole result of a political strategy determined by

the former Minister. Quite on the contrary, the control of EM's central leadership over the process of party development abroad appears to have been very limited, at least in its first phase. The initial organizational development of the party outside France has in fact followed Panebianco's pattern of 'territorial diffusion' (Panebianco 1988: 50–53). The first EM committees abroad were largely self-organized and self-funded. Local groups, such as the one established in Geneva in June 2016, were thus free to define their own structures and set of actions:

'When I started En Marche we were two, there was Joachim [Son-Forget] and me. I said to Joachim 'Well, let's organize a first meeting and the theme will be 'What do we want? From here, what is interesting and what could usefully be discussed in the program?' Thus, we started by doing something very participative, bottom-up. Even before there were workshops or anything similar'.⁸

Anne Dardelet, leader of the EM committee of Geneva during the 2017 election campaign (Interview by T. Kernalegenn, Geneva, 13 June 2018)

Until early 2017, local volunteers from a same city could even simultaneously register distinct local committees. It happened in most cities with significant French communities, such as San Francisco:

'I replied to an e-mail 'Would you want to create a committee when it will be possible to do so?' I answered 'Yes!' Six people in San Francisco answered 'Yes!' So six committees were created in San Francisco. We eventually merged them over a coffee'.

Loïc Le Gland, leader of the EM committee of San Francisco during the 2017 elections campaign (Interview by T. Kernalegenn, San Francisco, 12 April 2018)

The first EM local committees abroad differed widely in their composition. Some saw their membership rapidly grow to hundreds (i.e. in Brussels, London, Geneva or Montreal), while most never gathered more than a handful of volunteers. Dozens of committees even remained largely fictional: they had been registered on EM's website but never actually held any proper meeting. The profiles and political background of EM's first volunteers abroad also varied significantly. Some were long time expatriates, while other had left France only a few months earlier. Many were first-time activists, while others had already been involved for years in the local French community. Just like in metropolitan France (Lefebvre 2018), a significant number of former activists of the PS played a key role in the early development of Macron's movement overseas, especially in the cities with the largest French communities. For example, the first leaders of the local groups in Geneva (Joachim Son-Forget), Montreal (Christopher Weissberg) or Singapore (Mathias Assante) had in common to have been active in the PS in a very recent past. Yet, in other cases, the founders had a more centre-right political background. The EM committee in Brussels was thus founded by Pieyre-Alexandre Anglade, a political advisor to the liberal-centrist political group of the European Parliament. In Moscow, the first meeting of EM was even organized by the former delegate of the right-wing UMP in Russia, the consular councillor Nicolas Megrelis.

The personal figure of Macron played an instrumental role in gathering people with such various backgrounds. As noted by Cautrès, Pech and Vitiello (2018: 10), volunteers who decided to get involved in Macron's 2017 presidential campaign did so primarily because they believed in his personal ability to overcome the left-right opposition and to reform France. In that, the early developments of EM are reminiscent of the model of 'charismatic parties' theorized by Panebianco. At first, Macron's party clearly resembled an 'organization founded on exclusively personal ties, and the direct loyalty of the 'disciples' to the leader', which was

characterized by an absence of ‘rules’, ‘internal ‘career patterns’, and a clear division of labour’ (Panebianco 1988: 143–147).

An innovative electoral campaign

As his campaign was going along, Emmanuel Macron appeared to develop a growing interest in the French community living abroad. Like most of the prominent presidential candidates since the late 2000 (Collard 2013), he gradually recognized them as a distinct part of the electorate and began to address them tailored messages. While EM’s first canvassing campaign ‘*La Grande Marche*’ had not been implemented abroad, Macron eventually decided to launch a specific survey to gather expatriates’ opinion. In January 2017, all the citizens registered to vote abroad received an email from Emmanuel Macron inviting them to share their ‘views, experiences and ideas’ to modernize France. Such a survey – to which more than 10,000 expatriates answered⁹ – helped the candidate to define a specific ‘Program for French living abroad’ which was published in March 2017. It also enabled the party to collect contact information of thousands of new supporters outside France.

Macron also held more campaign events abroad than any of his opponents. After a two-day trip to Tunisia in November 2016, he went to New York in December, to Berlin and Beirut in January 2017, to Algiers and London in February, and once again to Berlin in March¹⁰. The main goal of those trips was clearly to improve his international standing by meeting with foreign leaders, as well as to raise funds for his campaign. However, in every country he visited, Macron also spared some time to participate in events with local supporters. On 21 February 2017, he thus held a 3,500-strong campaign rally in Central Hall Westminster in London, which was highly mediatised in both France and the United Kingdom.

The very composite and loose structure of Macron's party abroad proved to be a clear asset during the Presidential campaign. The lack of a clearly defined organizational and ideological framework indeed enabled each committee to adapt its way of campaigning to suit local context. Local volunteers were given great latitude in choosing which policy issue they wanted to put forward. Depending on the demographic and socio-economic structure of the local French communities (Verquin 2002; Duchêne-Lacroix 2005), they could decide to focus on Macron's proposals regarding, for example, retirement planning for expatriates, support to entrepreneurs, or access to the French educational system abroad. As the leader of EM's committee in Warsaw underlines, local groups were also enjoying great autonomy in setting up campaign actions in their constituency.

'In Warsaw, the people who joined us had for most of them never campaigned before. In my opinion 90% had never campaigned. [...] What attracted them to En Marche! was that our discourse was different; we had a freshness, an ability to listen and above all a real dialogue. We organized a lot of workshops, we organized close to a dozen events during the campaign, and we were very creative... We were completely free to organize a meeting on what we wanted, on what interested people here. The only thing was that we had to respect the policy of the movement, the benevolence, the values... but otherwise we were completely free'.

Jean-Claude Moustacakis, leader of the EM committee of Warsaw during the 2017 election campaign (Interview by C. Pellen, Warsaw, 20 April 2018).

Such a latitude favoured flexibility, spontaneity and inventiveness. Alongside classic campaigning techniques, such as organizing electoral meetings, distributing leaflets or sending emails, a lot of EM's local committees abroad developed more innovative actions such as 'electoral barbecues', 'electoral afterwork parties' or 'political speed dating'. The committee in Zurich even initiated a highly original 'political hiking' on April 2017:

‘The goal: to enjoy a superb panorama on Lake Zurich while exchanging, learning and discussing about the presidential campaign. Come and ask us all your questions in the open air!’
‘Zurich marche!’, Facebook page of EM Switzerland, 02 April 2017 (consulted on 08 November 2018)

In a more technological way, EM’s local committees from 17 American cities took the initiative to organize on March 2017 an ‘interactive visio-meeting’ hosting special guests from the leadership of the movement in Paris:

‘I said to myself “a politician will never come to San Francisco to say that Macron is the best!” And I told myself “Why not make a video-conference, with Paris” [...]. 17 cities from Buenos Aires to Montreal [...] got together. The guests were Laurence Haim, Axelle Tessandier, and Thomas Bajas¹¹ [...] We were at least 500 participants [...] We took advantage of similar time zones. And there were 17 cameras. [...] The person could ask his questions live. “So, Buenos Aires, do you have a question?” and the person could take the microphone, so there was a fun side.’

Loïc Le Gland (Interview by T. Kernalegenn, San Francisco, 12 April 2018).

It can be hypothesized that those innovative ways of campaigning contributed to increase the perception among French expatriates that Macron’s political offer was new and original. They were also, most probably, instrumental in forging a sense of community among EM members abroad by fuelling their feeling of being part of a pioneer political movement.

The structuring of a decentralized movement under the close control of the national leadership

In this section we show that the large autonomy that was initially granted to EM local committees abroad, was gradually eroded during the course of the election campaign and, notably, after Macron's victory. In what can be regarded as an attempt to strengthen party organizational machinery and to routinize Macron's charisma, the national leadership of EM introduced new internal procedures to regulate local committees. While these top-down decisions were globally welcomed by local volunteers abroad, they encountered growing opposition in some of the constituencies for French resident overseas, especially during June Parliamentary elections.

The top-down implementation of new organizational rules

As Macron was emerging as one of the most serious contenders in the presidential race, the national leadership of EM began showing a growing interest in the organization of local committees, which had been established in a relative disorder in the previous months. Three main decisions were taken in order to increase control over committees abroad without affecting their development.

Firstly, in December 2016, a position of 'international coordinator' was established within the party's central leadership. Thomas Bajas, a young Parisian with no personal experience of expatriation was appointed to the position, located in the movement's national headquarter in Paris. His missions were to help local groups abroad to organize efficiently, to provide them insights on Macron's presidential campaign and to manage the newly created Facebook account '*Les Français de l'étranger avec Macron*' (French Abroad with Macron). To build

and maintain a close relationship with EM's committees scattered around the world, Bajas made an extensive use of social networking and messaging services, notably *Skype* (to hold virtual meetings with local leaders of the committees) and the encrypted chatting software *Telegram* (to answer quickly to any request regardless of the time zone). Bajas also initiated a handful of 'virtual public meetings' tailored for French emigrants on *Facebook live* and *Skype*.

Secondly, a specific 'Platform for French living abroad' was published in March 2017. Its aim was to clarify Emmanuel Macron's project on several key issues for French expatriates.

'Electoral kits' based on this platform were made available for members abroad to campaign (posters, leaflets, emails, pictures, etc.). From March 2017 onwards, priority was no longer to discuss and debate among volunteers, but to promote the party platform:

'To be quite frank, once the workshops were over, we were in a campaign that was pretty much top-down. Once the messages had been set, the program had been set, we just had to circulate it and to remain within the framework'.

Anne Dardelet (Interview by T. Kernalegenn, Geneva, 13 June 2018)

Thirdly, EM's central leadership introduced new rules regarding the management of local committees. Initially, anybody was free to initiate a new local committee. As soon as Fall 2016, however, a preliminary verification process was introduced in the selection of local leaders. For example, in Switzerland, Joachim Son-Forget was nominated as the country's referent by the national leadership in Paris. One of his missions was to check the seriousness and motives of the new local committees' leaders, such as H  l  ne Rio in Zurich:

‘When I started clicking on the site En Marche! First, to be informed, second, to see what I could do, I said “well ok there is no committee in Zurich, I am available to create one”, it was like that. And things were really done bit by bit. It was Joachim who called me to discuss and see if it was possible to do something in Zurich [...] After that, I also met the person from Bern, Armelle Roussac [...] There wasn’t really any formal interview, but they were checking that it was not just anybody who wanted to create a committee. [...] In fact, we were two or three to have clicked in Zurich, and it appears that the other two never answered, or answered sporadically [...] So here they probably said [...]: “At least, not only did she click, but apparently she wants to do a little more, so let’s go with her”.’

Hélène Rio, leader of the EM committee of Zurich (Interview by T. Kernalegenn, Zurich, 17 July 2017).

During the Presidential campaign, the growing involvement of EM’s national leadership in the management of local groups abroad did not arouse any visible opposition among grass-roots activists. On the contrary, most of them seem to have welcomed what could then be perceived as a necessary clarification of a still very young political movement in an uncertain electoral context.

The setting-up of a pyramidal power structure

Following the election of Emmanuel Macron as President (7 May 2017), *En Marche!* was renamed *La République en Marche* (LREM). Beside the slight change in name, the party also experienced a profound restructuring aimed at turning it into a governing party by reinforcing its internal discipline. In this perspective, LREM’s national leadership – whose most members had been directly chosen by Macron – favoured a very centralized way of selecting candidates for June 2017 parliamentary elections.

It was decided that all aspiring candidates had to apply on the party website, with an updated CV and a cover letter. An *ad hoc* committee was established in order to examine the 19,000 applications received and allocate the nominations. Local committees were completely sidelined from the process. Of course, ‘ordinary’ members and local leaders of the party did try to express their opinion, for example by sending recommendation letters to the investiture committee. Yet, their influence on the candidate selection remained informal and very uncertain.

The name of the eleven recipients of LREM’s endorsement in the constituencies for French residents abroad was revealed on 15 May 2017. The profile and background of the nominated candidates differed largely from a constituency to another. Four different nomination patterns can be distinguished.

(1) In three cases, the nominated candidates were chosen among leaders of EM’s local committees abroad: Alexandre Holroyd in the 3rd, Pieyre-Alexandre Anglade in the 4th and Joachim Son-Forget in the 6th constituencies, respectively founders and animators of the committees of London, Brussels and Geneva. In these cases, there was a clear valorisation of the militant and autochthonous capital of the candidates. Holroyd, Anglade and Son-Forget had in common to be long-time expatriates in cities with large French emigrant communities and to have played a key role in the establishment and structuring of EM local committees. They could also count on a broad support among local volunteers.

(2) In two cases, the selected candidates were well-known figures of the French expatriate community and early members of EM in the constituency: Roland Lescure (a former chief investment officer of Quebec Deposit and Investment Fund) in the 1st and Anne Genetet (a

community leader and wife of a former socialist leader in Singapore) in the 11th. In these cases, the investiture committee's choice combines valorisation of early investment in the movement with autochthonous and expertise.

(3) In three cases, the selected candidates had not been active members of EM's committees in the constituency previously, even though they had personal or professional ties with it: Paula Forteza in the 2nd, Samantha Cazebonne in the 4th, and Amal Amélia Lakrafi in the 10th. These three candidates, who were selected among the so-called 'civil society', had in common to be women and to benefit from influential allies within EM's national leadership. These cases combine a lighter autochthonous capital with relations with the political centre, gender, but also expertise. Cazebonne was thus presented as an expert in education issues, Lakrafi as an expert in cyber security issues and Forteza as an expert on digital economy.

(4) Finally, in the last three cases, the candidates had strong personal and professional ties with the constituency and had been involved for years in another political party than EM: Frédéric Petit (the founder of the Modem section in Poland) in the 7th, Florence Drory (a former chair of the PS in Israel) in the 8th and Leila Aïchi (a former French senator for the Green Party who had afterwards joined the Modem) in the 9th. In these cases, nominations had been dictated by the political alliances made at the national level by the leadership of LREM.

Local committees abroad did not welcome equally the nominated candidates. In the first two sets of cases above mentioned, the decision of the investiture committee did not face any major opposition. Holroyd, Anglade, Son-Forget, Lescure and Genetet were already well-known figures among grass-roots volunteers who did not hesitate to get involved in their campaign as actively as they had been in Macron's. In the third set of cases, the committee's

choices were initially publicly contested by some local leaders (who had often run themselves unsuccessfully for the nomination). Yet, Cazebonne, Lakrafi and Forteza eventually managed to build on their personal experience of expatriation and their good relations with LREM national leaders to overcome the initial reservations and campaigned without any notable difficulties in their constituency. In the fourth set of cases, however, the nominated candidates were never fully accepted by local members. In the 7th and 8th constituencies, several local committees openly refused to campaign for them, sometimes, like in Poland, with the tacit agreement of the party's national leadership:

‘The HQ was very embarrassed after they nominated Frédéric Petit, of the Modem. To be honest I'm not sure they fully realized that they had given him such an important constituency in Europe, with Germany and everything. And so, roughly speaking, we were free not to campaign for him. And that's what we decided to do’.

Jean-Claude Moustacakis (Interview by C. Pellen, Warsaw, 20 April 2018).

In the 9th constituency for French residents overseas (covering Maghreb and North-West Africa) the situation got even more confused. Besides being criticized for being a carpetbagger candidate, Leila Aïchi rapidly had to face severe attacks on her position concerning Western Sahara. Eventually, several local committees in Morocco decided to enter into dissidence by nominating an alternative candidate, M'jid El Guerrab, a former socialist activist who had recently joined EM's group in Casablanca. In an exceptional shift, the national leadership eventually agreed to unofficially recognize El Guerrab as a legitimate candidate of the party in the last day of the campaign.

The June 2017 legislative elections were the first genuine test of strength for LREM's structure abroad. For the first time, vivid tensions between local groups abroad and the

national leadership emerged. The authoritarian way in which candidates had been chosen was a source of misunderstanding and disappointment to members who had seen in Macron's movement a tool for democratic renewal. In the constituencies where the candidates were the least well accepted, this led to a clear weakening of the party structure. Numerous local volunteers preferred to put an end to their (often recent) political commitment than to campaign for candidates who they perceived as illegitimate. Militant disengagement was particularly noteworthy in the 7th, 8th and 9th constituencies for French citizens living abroad. It had a strong impact on LREM candidates' ability to campaign actively and, eventually, on their final result. Florence Drory (8th) and Leila Aïchi (9th) are the sole LREM's candidates abroad to have been defeated. Conversely, in the constituencies where the candidates had been selected among local leaders or prominent members, the June 2017 Parliamentary election campaign reinforced the cohesion of local committees. In the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 6th and 11nd constituencies for French residents abroad, LREM candidates managed to maintain the momentum of the Presidential election and to carry out lively election campaigns. Eventually, they all got elected by a wide margin.

'The team that got EM going in the UK during the presidential election was the same than the one that campaigned for me during the legislative elections. With the difference that it was reinforced by the teams from Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, etc. [...] Local committees really played a central role in my campaign. They helped strengthen the movement's structure throughout the constituency. [...] But I was really surprised by the extent of the volunteers' mobilization and eventually by my result'.

Alexander Holroyd, leader of the EM committee of London and LREM candidate in the 3rd constituency for French citizens living abroad (Phone interview by C. Pellen, 30 January 2018).

Table 1. LREM candidates in overseas constituencies

Constituency		Candidate	Party Affiliation	Nomination pattern	Votes (in %)		Final Result
					First round	Second Round	
1	North-America	Roland Lescure	LREM	2	57.5	79.7	Elected
2	South-America	Paula Forteza	LREM	3	43.2	60.9	Elected
3	UK and Scandinavia	Alexandre Holroyd	LREM	1	57.8	70.1	Elected
4	Benelux	Pieyre-Alexandre Anglade	LREM	1	52.3	73.7	Elected
5	Iberian Peninsula & Monaco	Samantha Cazebonne	LREM	3	50.4	66.2	Elected
6	Switzerland	Joachim Son-Forget	LREM	1	63.5	74.9	Elected
7	Central Europe	Frédéric Petit	Modem – LREM	4	54	62.9	Elected
8	Israel, Italie, Greece & Turkey,	Florence Drory	LREM	4	36.7	42.1	Defeated
9	North-West Africa	Leila Aïchi	Modem (LREM withdrew its nomination in late May 2017)	4	20.3	40.3	Defeated
9	North-West Africa	M'jid El Guerrab	Independent (received an unofficial backing of LREM in early June 2017)	4	18.9	59.7	Elected
10	Central, Eastern and Southern Africa & the Middle East	Amal Amélia Lakrafi	LREM	3	60.1	71.2	Elected
11	Asia, Oceania & Eastern Europe	Anne Genetet	LREM	2	54.1	71.7	Elected

In sum, the takeover from LREM's national leadership of the June 2017 parliamentary election campaign, which was particularly sensitive in the candidate selection process, had varying implications on local committees abroad. In some constituencies, the choices of the national leadership were perceived as unacceptable 'diktats' by activists and resulted in a

weakening of local party structures. Conversely, in others, they were well accepted, and they strengthened local committees. Given that constituencies in which the selected candidates were most supported by local volunteers were also those in which the local committees were already the strongest, LREM's Parliamentary election campaign resulted in increasing inequalities in the party's presence abroad. While LREM's local committees in Western European and North American countries were among the most active and attractive at the end of the election cycle in early summer 2017 (notably in Switzerland, Belgium, United Kingdom, Canada and the United States), others (notably in Northern Africa, Israel or Eastern Europe) have been deeply weakened since Macron's victory in May, in some cases to the point of disappearing completely.

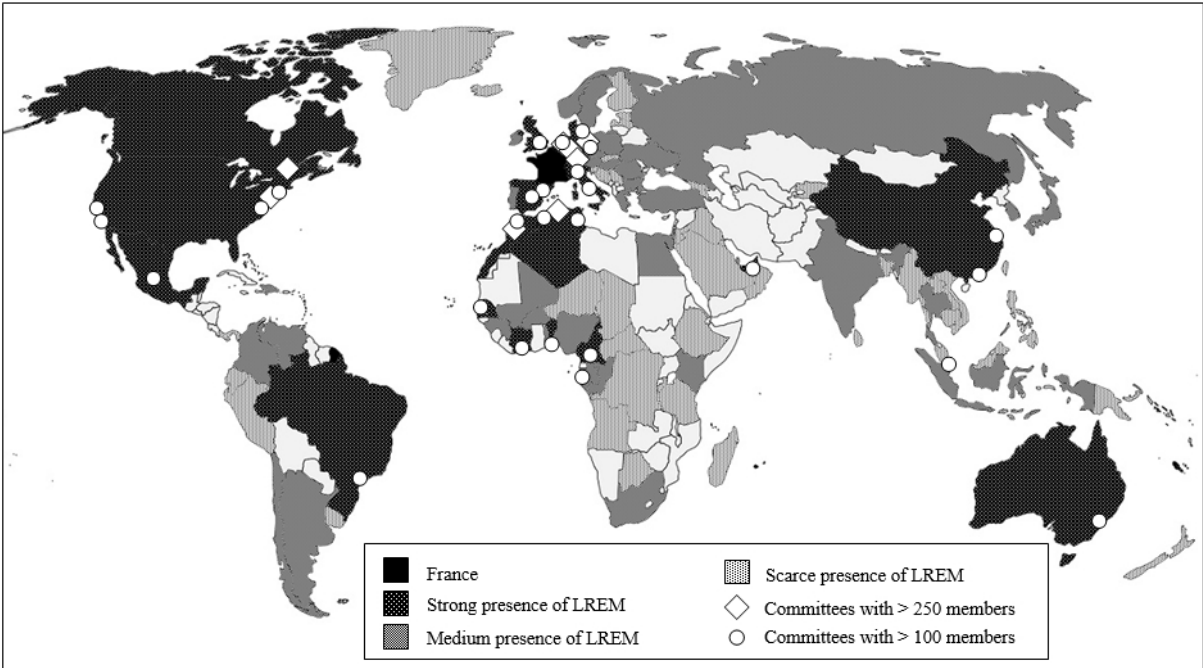
The long-term structuring of a political party abroad

Once the election period was over, LREM's national leadership decided to intensify the process of clarifying the party's organizational structure. On July 2017, new statutes of the party were ratified by a large majority of members. An intermediary level of leadership was added in the party structure between the central governing bodies and the local committees: that of regional 'referents'. These 132 referents (16 of which among French abroad) are nominated directly by the national bureau with the mission of coordinating and stimulating the activities of local committees in their regional district. According to the central leadership, the new statutes would allow LREM to consolidate its functioning over time and to overcome the challenges that any ruling party has to face at one point, among which preserving internal discipline, maintaining grass-roots membership, and coping with potential disappointment regarding policies implemented by the government.

The 16 regional referents of LREM abroad have been rather well accepted by local activists. Even though the way the regional referents were selected was barely less authoritarian than the way candidates for Parliament had been, this time all the recipients were locally well known and consensual figures. All of them had been actively involved in LREM's 2017 election campaigns abroad, often as leader of one of the local committees in the district. Besides, since their nomination, most of them seem to have opted for a rather 'soft' management of local committees, favouring participation and consultation of local volunteers over top-down decisions.

Most local committees abroad faced difficulties to maintain membership and activities after the elections. In most constituencies, the number of active local groups is much lower than during the 2017 election campaigns and the number of active members worldwide has considerably decreased. However, such a decline in activism is not specific to LREM, nor to expatriates. It has impacted all other political parties' branches overseas, often in a stronger way than LREM. On the other hand, LREM's local structures abroad remain in a relatively good shape in most of the cities with the largest French emigrant communities, notably in Northern America and in Western Europe. For example, the local committees in Brussels, Geneva, Washington or Montreal still regularly organize political meetings, debates or grassroots actions. Even though its structures abroad are much shallower than they were at the climax of the Presidential campaign, LREM still appears to be by far the French party with the strongest local branches outside France. With eight deputies of the French residents overseas out of eleven¹² and an estimate 22,000 members abroad, it is indisputably the new dominant actor in the French political space abroad. With 5.7% of the total members of LREM, while French expatriates only represents 2.6% of the French population, the party branches abroad can even be considered to be a stronghold of the party (Cautrès *et al.* 2018).

Figure 3. The implantation of LREM¹³



Source: Data collected by the authors in November 2018.

Conclusion

The initial organizational choice to give local committees considerable freedom in defining their mode of operation is a key element to understand the rapid development of EM, especially abroad. This freedom aroused the enthusiasm of the first volunteers by accentuating their feeling of participating in an innovative, democratic and horizontal political movement. However, from March 2017, Emmanuel Macron and his closest advisers have gradually questioned this broad autonomy. They institutionalized the nascent party by introducing formal internal procedures to streamline the party structure, to clarify the division of labour between national and local levels, and to specify its doctrine. Although the national leadership unilaterally defined these reforms, most grassroots activists initially accepted them as necessary and useful measures. The intensification of the party’s centralization and

hierarchization following Macron's victory at the presidential election created more tensions. The exclusion of local committees from the candidate selection process for the parliamentary elections then fuelled the first major internal conflicts. Despite these controversies, which had only a limited effect on the party's performance in the legislative elections, the top-down organization of LREM continued after the summer 2017.

In addition to shedding light on the specific logics of the development of LREM outside France – a relatively 'spontaneous' territorial diffusion followed by a partisan 'normalization' imposed by the centre – this case study highlights structuring characteristics of the French political space abroad and contributes to the understanding of the issue of parties abroad.

Firstly, it confirms the decisive influence of institutional factors on extraterritorial party development. As in Romania (see Gherghina and Soare, this volume), it is the granting of extended political rights to French emigrants, and particularly the creation of special representation in the National Assembly, that drove the national political parties to develop branches outside France. The development of EM outside France is thus inseparable from the electoral context of 2017 and the desire of its national leadership to optimize its mobilization capacity among expatriate voters.

Nevertheless, our analysis also shows that the investment of extraterritorial constituencies by national parties cannot be reduced to a mere strategic calculation of the central leadership. As the case of EM shows, the first initiatives to set up committees abroad often come from French expatriates themselves. It is only in a second phase that the central organs of the parties try to structure these local groups by constituting them into hierarchical networks.

Thirdly, our fieldwork attests to a normalization over time of the political space of French nationals abroad. All French parties are now present abroad and the activities of their local party sections are – at least on paper – quite similar to those of their counterparts in metropolitan France, whether it is for example the online presence, the organization of regular meetings or the implementation of field actions. Party sections abroad thus contribute to build up a civic bond between French expatriates and their country of origin. They build it by exporting French election campaigns abroad, making them visible in the local public space and creating moments for meetings and political exchanges for French citizens living abroad. They also participate in the identification of problems specific to expatriates and contribute to their transformation into political demands formulated at the national level.

However, our analysis also reveals the uncompleted nature of the development of French parties abroad. Their location is uneven and appears limited to cities with the largest French population. Above all, overseas sections face even more difficulties than their metropolitan counterparts to stabilize their activities and membership after the elections. They must face at least three specific challenges: the geographical distance with the centre of French political power; their insertion into foreign political systems that can constrain their activities; and finally, a significant turnover of their members, which is due to the high mobility of expatriates. So far, LREM seems to have coped better than the other parties with these difficulties over time. Despite having experienced a clear weakening since 2017, local committees of the party outside France are still today the largest and most active groups of French nationals abroad.

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¹ In this article, we use the terms of ‘expatriate’ and ‘emigrant’ as synonymous. They convey a different imaginary but refer to a same reality.

² Following the election of Emmanuel Macron as President on 7 May 2017, En Marche! was renamed *La République en Marche* (The Republic on the move – LREM).

³ However, as from 2019, French emigrants must either be registered abroad (and therefore lose their right to vote in French local and regional elections) or in France (and therefore unable to vote in their country of residence).

⁴ For example, for the legislative election of 2012 and the election for consular councils in 2014.

⁵ ‘Message de Richard Ferrand aux Français de l’étranger avec Macron’, 9 January 2017.

⁶ ‘La République en Marche face à l’accueil du parti normal’, *La Croix*, 16 November 2017.

⁷ ‘PS – Français de l’étranger. Qui sommes-nous ?’, September 2012, www.ffe-ps.org/qui-sommes-nous/.

⁸ All the interviews were translated from French into English by the authors.

⁹ ‘10 000 Français de l’étranger ont répondu’, Consular electoral register e-mail, 18 February 2017.

¹⁰ ‘Comment Macron tisse sa toile à l’étranger’, *Le Parisien*, 16 March 2017.

¹¹ Respectively, EM spokesperson, national delegate, and international coordinator.

¹² Since June 2017, two LREM deputies have left the party: M’jid El Guerrab and Joachim Son Forget.

¹³ By strong presence, we mean several committees active on the long run, including at least one having more than 100 members. By medium presence we mean several active committees, at least one of which has more than 50 members. By scarce presence we mean the existence of at least one formal LREM committee in the country.