

Document Version Preprint versión

Citation for published version (APA):

Vintila, D., Pamies, C. & Paradés, M. Electoral (non)alignment between resident and non-resident voters: evidence from Spain. *Eur Polit Sci* 22, 63–82 (2023).

<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-022-00411-8>

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Electoral (Non)Alignment between Resident and Non-Resident Voters:

Evidence from Spain

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Abstract: Over the past decades, diasporas' engagement in homeland elections has become a highly salient issue, especially given the widespread implementation of enfranchisement policies for citizens living abroad. Spain stands out in the European context with its long emigration history, its sizeable population abroad, and a recent enactment of the so-called '*voto rogado*' ('begged vote') system that hindered external voting by requiring non-resident citizens to submit a separate voter registration application to become eligible for casting the ballot in Spanish elections. Yet, little is known so far about the voting patterns of Spaniards abroad. This article aims to fill this gap by examining the electoral (non)alignment between resident and non-resident voters in the Spanish general elections held over the past three decades. We argue that a comprehensive assessment of electoral (non)alignment must consider two different analytical layers of turnout and party choice. The article shows that changing electoral rules on extra-territorial voting, the increasingly diverse profile of Spaniards abroad, and Spanish parties' strategies towards the diaspora interact to account for differences in overseas Spaniards' turnout rates and party choices when compared to resident voters.

Keywords: electoral alignment, turnout, party choice, diaspora, Spain.

1. Introduction

In a context of accelerated globalization in which human mobility has steadily increased and diversified, the participation of non-resident citizens in homeland elections has gained increased visibility, following a globally widespread trend of enactment of external voting rights (Bauböck, 2005; Délano and Gamlen, 2014; Collyer, 2017; Arrighi and Lafleur, 2019). The effect of diaspora enfranchisement policies is particularly noteworthy across states counting with sizeable overseas populations that have a strong potential to influence homeland politics. Yet, it remains unclear how the electoral behaviour of external voters compares to that of resident voters. Few case studies (mostly focused on the Global South or more recent European emigration countries) have thoroughly explored this question so far (Fidrmuc and Doyle, 2005; Escobar *et al.*, 2015; Lafleur and Sánchez-Domínguez, 2015; Goldberg and Lanz, 2019). Yet, the evidence they provide is rather inconclusive on how turnout rates of citizens abroad vary from those of domestic voters or whether these two segments of the electorate converge (or not) in their party choices.

This article contributes to the debate regarding electoral (non)alignment between resident and non-resident citizens by addressing the following research question: do voters abroad display a different electoral behaviour when compared to domestic voters and, if so, what accounts for such differences? We argue that a comprehensive understanding of the effect of migration on electoral behaviour requires disentangling the alignment between in-country and out-of-country voting into different analytical layers: the first one refers to potential similarities or differences between the turnout rates of resident and non-resident voters, whereas the second one is reflected in their party choices. Overall, these two dimensions provide an indication of how migration may contribute to (extra)territorial cleavage voting by capturing if the electorate abroad forms a different 'block' than domestic voters. As we will explain, differentiated patterns of electoral behaviour of external voters, when compared to their resident counterparts, may be attributed to several (often intertwined) factors related not only to emigrants' characteristics or the legal framework in which their participation takes place, but also to homeland parties' strategies to attract votes from abroad.

We test the argument of the electoral (non)alignment between resident and non-resident citizens by focusing on the Spanish case over the past three decades. Spain has witnessed sustained emigration leading to sizeable emigrant communities settled in different world regions. Although the country introduced external voting in national parliamentary elections since 1977, the modalities of voting from abroad have changed over the years, by making it harder for non-residents to participate in Spanish elections. Yet, despite rising controversies around the issue (especially among legal scholars- see Ripollés, 2010; García Mahamut, 2012; Mateos Crespo, 2019), the question of how emigration affects Spaniards' electoral behaviour has not been systematically explored so far.

The article is structured as follows. The next section discusses some key theoretical aspects regarding overseas citizens' participation in homeland elections and the array of factors expected to shape their electoral (non)alignment compared to resident voters. The third section contextualises the Spanish case in terms of emigration trends and external voting regulations. The fourth section presents our findings regarding the gap between resident and non-resident Spaniards in turnout and party choices. We conclude with some general remarks on how migration has challenged our understanding of voting cleavages in the Spanish case.

2. Diaspora Engagement in Homeland Politics and Electoral (Non)Alignment: Theoretical Remarks

Over the past decades, the nexus between international migration and electoral politics of origin countries has received increased scholarly attention. A burgeoning literature has documented how a growing number of countries worldwide connect with their overseas populations by allowing them to vote from abroad. This widespread emigrant enfranchisement has been assessed as a global norm to support extra-territorial citizenship and 'make the absent present' (Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019; Burgess and Tyburski, 2020). The motivations behind it vary: from governments' interests in consolidating extra-territorial ties and ensuring political support from abroad to ethnic conceptions of nationhood, processes of democratization or horizontal policy diffusion (Bauböck, 2005; Brand, 2014;

Lisi *et al.*, 2015; Collyer, 2017; Arrighi and Lafleur, 2019; Turcu and Urbatsch, 2020a; Umpierrez de Reguero *et al.*, 2021).

The outcomes of extra-territorial franchise also vary depending on their contextual embeddedness. Its effects are expected to be more visible across countries with sizeable populations abroad, as high shares of external voters indicate a strong potential to influence the results of homeland elections. Yet, such electoral potential may not materialize into effective participation. Studies show that non-resident citizens often make a limited use of their voting rights, thus raising concerns on how much extra-territorial enfranchisement matters in practice (Lafleur, 2013; Burgess and Tyburski, 2020; Wellman, 2021). In some cases, their limited turnout rates are rather aligned with those of resident voters, whereas in others, there is still a significant gap between out-of-country and in-country turnout, with overseas citizens participating less than their resident counterparts.

Such mixed evidence has led scholars to enquire about the determinants of external turnout. The accessibility of voting from abroad when compared to in-country voting plays a major role in explaining turnout (non)alignment between resident and non-resident citizens. The assumption that individuals are more prone to participate in elections if voting is easy is a legitimate one (Oliver, 1996; Blais, 2006). Although extra-territorial suffrage is common, its modalities vary widely (Collyer, 2017). Cumbersome voting procedures may hinder the electoral potential that citizens abroad *a priori* have based on their size, by making it harder for them to vote compared to resident citizens (Lisi *et al.*, 2015). Administrative constraints may occur at different stages of the electoral process. Some countries increase the costs of absentee voting by requiring non-resident citizens to apply for electoral registration to become entitled to vote, even when resident voters are automatically registered (Oliver, 1996). Once registered, the methods of casting the ballot from abroad also matter: while some states allow overseas citizens to choose between different modalities (in-person voting at embassies/consulates, postal, proxy or electronic voting), others offer only some of these options (Collyer, 2017; Schmid *et al.*, 2019; Cross-reference in this SI).

As highlighted in the literature, certain factors could partially compensate the negative effects of administrative obstacles for external voting on turnout rates. Despite bureaucratic hurdles for voting from abroad, non-resident citizens may still decide to participate if elections are highly contested, especially since strong party competition also incentivizes homeland parties to invest time/resources in reaching out to voters abroad who may otherwise abstain (Blais, 2006; Peltoniemi, 2018; Burgess and Tyburski, 2020; Wellman, 2021). Additionally, drawing on the findings of classic electoral studies (Verba and Nie, 1972; Verba *et al.*, 1995), scholars have argued that diasporic communities with sufficient resources (education, financial stability) to participate in homeland elections may still decide to do so, regardless of the administrative difficulties for external voting (Escobar *et al.*, 2015; Goldberg and Lanz, 2019; Burgess and Tyburski, 2020). Yet, the time spent abroad –and especially, early socialization in residence countries– may negatively affect a diaspora’s participation in homeland elections (Chaudhary, 2018; Peltoniemi, 2018) by presumably limiting overseas citizens’ interest in (or awareness of) homeland politics compared to domestic voters.

(Non)alignment between resident and non-resident voters may occur not only in turnout, but also in their party choices. Although fewer studies have enquired about emigrants’ party preferences, some showed that non-residents oftentimes support different parties than resident citizens (Lafleur and Sánchez-Domínguez, 2015; Goldberg and Lanz, 2019; Turcu and Urbatsch, 2020b). The evidence on which specific parties external voters prefer is mixed: in some cases, they show stronger preference for opposition parties, whereas in others, incumbent parties receive stronger support from abroad than from resident voters (Fidrmuc and Doyle, 2005; Wellman, 2021). The effect of ideology on overseas citizens’ party choices is also unclear. Although European diasporas’ rights have been historically promoted by right-wing parties (Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019; Østergaard-Nielsen *et al.*, 2019; Wellman, 2021), emigration also gained salience among leftist parties, especially in contexts of increased party competition (Rashkova and Van der Staak, 2020).

Emigrants’ party choices may also respond to the efforts of ‘political mobilisers’ (Oliver, 1996). Homeland parties have become increasingly creative in setting up outreach activities abroad in their vote seeking strategy, thus becoming important mobilisers for the extra-territorial electorate (Burgess

2018; Borz, 2020; Rashkova, 2020; van Haute and Kernalegenn, 2021). Some of their activities targeting external voters concentrate during the electoral period (online or abroad campaigning), while others occur between elections (creation of party branches abroad, institutionalizing party agencies for emigration issues, etc.).

This article contributes to the research line on electoral (non)alignment between resident and non-resident voters by providing new evidence on turnout and party choice (dis)similarities between these two parts of the electorate. In doing so, we focus on Spain, a country with large numbers of overseas citizens whose access to voting rights has become not only more restricted in recent years, but also increasingly controversial in Spanish politics and society.

3. The Spanish Context: Emigration Patterns and External Voting Regulations

Most studies on emigrants' participation in homeland elections focused on countries that experienced negative net migration (Peltoniemi, 2018; Goldberg and Lanz, 2019). In turn, this article focuses on Spain, a country that returns positive net migration, while counting with a long emigration history.

Spain registered important outflows even before World War I, mostly towards the Americas. Around 1.5-2 million Spaniards left the country between 1905 and 1914, with Argentina hosting more than 60 per cent of those moving to the Americas (Nicolau, 2005). Emigration intensified during the 1950s-1960s, when large numbers of Spaniards (predominantly male with lower education) moved abroad for better work opportunities (López de Lera, 2020). Latin America continued to be their preferred destination, although emigration to France, Germany or Switzerland increased significantly since the 1960s (around 1.9 million Spaniards moved to other European countries between 1960 and 1967- Nicolau, 2005). The outflows have decreased since the 1970s, but intensified again with the 2008 financial crisis that severely affected the Spanish labour market. Yet, recent emigrants display a different profile: young and highly qualified Spaniards –moving especially to Germany, the UK or France- form an important share of the new outflows, with the brain drain phenomenon becoming increasingly controversial (Arango, 2016; Bermudez and Brey, 2017).

Quantifying how many Spanish citizens reside abroad is challenging, as official figures underestimate the real numbers. Spaniards are removed from the Municipal Register of Residents in Spain only when they register at a consulate abroad, which leads to their inclusion in the Register of Spaniards Living Abroad. Although consular registration is compulsory, there are no sanctions for those who fail to enrol. Many emigrants (especially recent emigrants and those living in European countries) are reluctant to declare their residence abroad, as this entails losing their right to healthcare, unemployment subsidies or social assistance in Spain (Bermudez and Brey, 2017). Such limited incentives, coupled with the lack of sanctions and the costs of traveling to (sometimes remotely distant) cities where consulates are located, help to explain the lack of accuracy in the official figures on overseas Spaniards (Arango, 2016).

Bearing in mind these limitations, Table 1 shows the official statistics on Spaniards registered in the Electoral Census of Absent Residents (*Censo Electoral de Residentes Ausentes*, CERA) since 1986. All Spaniards in voting age who declared their habitual residence abroad at Spanish consulates (thus being included in the Register of Spaniards Living Abroad) are automatically enrolled in the CERA census. The latter covers all non-resident citizens who meet the requirements for being voters in Spanish elections; and it is different from the Electoral Census of Residents (*Censo Electoral de Residentes*, CER) which includes voters residing in Spain.

[Table 1 near here]

As observed, the number of overseas citizens has significantly increased over the past three decades, from around 257,000 individuals in 1986 (less than 1 per cent of the total voting age population) to more than 2.1 million in 2019 (5 per cent). Much of this increase is due to recent

outflows¹: official statistics on residential variations (based on the number of registrations and deregistrations from the Municipal Register of Residents in Spain) indicate that more than 800,000 Spaniards left the country between 2007 and 2019. Most reside either in Europe or in Latin America. Argentina hosts the largest number (more than 400,000 Spaniards in 2019), followed by France (almost 220,000) and Germany (almost 130,000).

The overseas population is quite diverse. According to the 2019 data of the Register of Spaniards Abroad, the share of young Spaniards aged 20-44 years was particularly high in the UK (44 per cent), Switzerland (39 per cent), and Germany (38 per cent), countries that became attractive destinations even for recent emigrants since 2008. In turn, 35 per cent of all Spaniards in Argentina are aged 65+, with high shares of elderly Spaniards being observed also in Venezuela (31 per cent), Uruguay (30 per cent) or France (26 per cent). Around a half of those living in the UK, and a quarter of those residing in Germany and Switzerland, are highly educated, with the proportion of university graduates being much lower in France (15 per cent) or Argentina (6 per cent) (OECD 2015). Most overseas citizens originate from Spanish regions of historical emigration, including Galicia (22 per cent of all Spaniards abroad in voting age in 2019), Madrid (15 per cent), Catalonia (13 per cent), Andalusia (10 per cent), Castile and León or the Canary Islands (7 per cent in each case).

Furthermore, Spain is a very interesting case study also given the peculiarities of its legislation regulating external voting in general elections. Although voting from abroad was introduced since 1977², several amendments have progressively restricted emigrants' practical access to extra-territorial voting. To begin with, although it was already foreseen in 1977 that citizens abroad could register in a special electoral census, such registration was voluntary and with a temporary application (Ripollés, 2010). In practice, no distinction was made between the votes of resident and non-resident citizens, so

¹ It is also partly due to the enactment of Law 36/2002 and the 2007 Historical Memory Law facilitating citizenship acquisition for emigrants' descendants and the descendants of Civil War exiles (Mateos Crespo, 2019).

² Royal Decree 3341/1977, published in the Official Monitor on 3rd of January 1978,

<https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1978-28> (last accessed 19/04/2022).

there is no statistical information on how many overseas Spaniards voted during that period. It was not until the 1985 Electoral Law³ that overseas Spaniards had to request their registration in the CERA census at consulates abroad, with those enrolled in this census receiving the electoral documentation by post. The system changed again in 1995, when the Electoral Census Office started to send the voting ballot to all Spaniards who registered their residence abroad at Spanish consulates. Consequently, just by being registered in the consular registry, overseas citizens were automatically entitled to vote from abroad, and they could cast the ballot either by post or via consulates.

The fact that the CERA census could have included erroneous data, potentially leading to electoral fraud due to voter impersonation (Mateos Crespo, 2019), became an important argument for another external voting reform in 2011. The amendment introduced what is known as the '*voto rogado*' ('begged vote') system⁴. Since 2011, Spaniards abroad who wish to vote in homeland elections have been required not only to be enrolled in the consular registry, but also to submit a separate application expressing their interest to vote from abroad (which led to the use of the term 'begged vote', especially since Spaniards in Spain are automatically registered as voters). Such application must be submitted prior to each general election⁵ by post, fax or online. Once approved, registered overseas voters receive the electoral documentation by post. They may vote by post or in person at Spanish consulates abroad; or by post in Spain, if they find themselves in Spain during the elections. Most importantly, this long bureaucratic procedure must be completed rather quickly, between 29 and four days before the election day. It also involved important delays in sending/receiving the electoral documentation or postal vote, particularly from territorially distant countries. Such delays were constantly reported by *Marea Granate*

³ <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-1985-11672> (last accessed 19/04/2022).

⁴ <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2011-1639> (last accessed 19/04/2022).

⁵ Except for 2019, when two general elections were held and voters who requested to vote in April automatically received the ballot also in November.

(Maroon Wave), a transnational group of Spaniards abroad denouncing the difficulties of the 'begged vote' system⁶.

4. The Nexus between Emigration, Turnout, and Party Choice among Spanish Voters

This section examines the electoral (non)alignment between resident and non-resident voters by breaking down their electoral behaviour into two different analytical layers of turnout and party choice.

4.1. Electoral (Non)Alignment between In-Country and Out-of-Country Turnout

Although the number of Spaniards abroad in voting age has notably increased since the enactment of external voting, overseas citizens made a relatively limited use of their electoral rights. Even before the 2011 reform introducing the 'begged vote' system, their turnout rates were consistently lower than those of resident citizens (around 40 per cent difference between 1986 and 2008). Such non-alignment confirms the broader trend that the past studies, discussed above, have identified across many overseas communities around the world, which still participate less in homeland elections than resident citizens. The turnout gap between external and domestic voters was observed across all Spanish regions, although it was usually lower in regions of historical emigration such as Galicia or the Canary Islands.

[Figure 1 near here]

Assessing turnout from abroad after the 2011 electoral amendment is a more complicated task. Scholars have already drawn attention to the struggle of accurately measuring extra-territorial turnout in countries that impose electoral registration requirements on overseas citizens, given potential biases in calculating external votes as a share of voting-eligible population abroad or as a share of the registered

⁶ <https://mareagranate.org/> (last accessed 19/04/2022).

electorate abroad (Lafleur, 2013; Burgess and Tyburski, 2020). Figure 1 offers two measurements of external voters' turnout since 2011. The first one (continuous grey line) measures external turnout as the share of those who voted from abroad from all those registered in the CERA census⁷. The second one (dotted black line), calculates turnout as the share of overseas citizens who voted from all those who submitted the voter registration application following the enactment of the 2011 'begged vote' system.

The two measurements highlight different narratives. The first one (used in official reporting on overseas Spaniards' participation) indicates a significant decrease in the participation rate of non-resident citizens since 2011. Turnout from abroad dropped from 32 per cent in 2008 to 5 per cent in 2011 after the implementation of the 'begged vote' system; and it maintained at very low levels ever since. This implicitly meant a remarkable increase in the turnout gap between resident and non-resident voters (around 60 per cent lower participation rate from abroad since 2011). The decline was particularly noteworthy across Spanish regions with large populations abroad, including Canarias (93 per cent decrease in external turnout in 2011 compared to 2008), Galicia (86 per cent), Castile and León (82 per cent), Catalonia (81 per cent), Andalusia (81 per cent) or Madrid (69 per cent). It clearly demonstrates the negative effect of the 'begged vote' system that significantly increased the costs of absentee voting, leading to what civil society organisations have criticized as a *de facto* exclusion of emigrants from Spanish elections⁸. The second measurement, however, tells another interesting story. More than a half of all those who took the effort to register to vote since 2011 cast the ballot, thus showing their interest in influencing Spanish politics despite the complicated voting procedure from abroad. In this second scenario, the turnout non-alignment between resident and non-resident voters thus becomes less pronounced; and almost non-existent since 2016.

⁷ The CERA census is the most reliable stock to measure extra-territorial turnout in the Spanish case as it includes all non-resident citizens who meet the requirements for being voters in Spanish elections.

⁸ See the diaspora survey conducted by *Marea Granate*: <https://mareagranate.org/2016/02/la-democracia-del-voto-exterior-20d-minima-participacion-historica-mas-irregularidades-nunca/> (last accessed 19/04/2022).

Although the ‘begged vote’ system decreased overseas turnout, its negative effects became more visible for some diasporic communities than others. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of turnout (share of voters over those registered in the CERA census) in the top ten residence countries of Spaniards abroad. Although external turnout slightly improved across almost all major destinations since 2011, interesting cross-country variations can be observed.

[Figure 2 near here]

Participation was much lower from territorially distant countries in Latin America (especially Argentina) than from Europe. Among European destinations, the share of those casting the ballot from Germany, Switzerland, or the UK increased since 2011, being usually above the average turnout for all Spaniards abroad. As mentioned, these are also the countries with higher shares of highly educated young Spaniards –and especially so, of ‘new’ emigrants who left Spain after 2008 and still maintain close links with the homeland (Arango, 2016; Bermudez and Brey, 2017). These factors can thus contribute to better understand the higher participation rates from these countries compared to the emigrant communities settled elsewhere.

Argentina and France also deserve a special mention, since they have historically been the most important settlement countries for Spanish emigrants of relatively similar socio-economic profiles. Whereas very few Spaniards voted from Argentina since 2011, turnout from France was higher than the average extra-territorial turnout during this period. Unlike in most other countries, the participation rates from Argentina even decreased since 2011, with the Consultative Council of Spanish Residents in Argentina being the first one within the network of consultative bodies of overseas Spaniards to protest against the ‘begged vote’ system⁹. These differences can be mainly attributed to delays in sending the

⁹ <https://www.laregioninternacional.com/articulo/cgcee/voto-rogado-cre-buenos-aires-fue-primero-protestar-cambio-loreg/20190417232114260257.html> (last accessed 19/04/2022).

electoral documentation by post outside Europe and the uneven capacity of consular delegations to handle numerous petitions¹⁰. Regarding this latter aspect, Lafleur and Vintila (2020) showed that although Spain is the second EU Member State with the largest consular network in top destinations, such network is still insufficient to cover the requests of an increasingly sizeable diaspora, given the ratio between the number of consulates and the number of overseas Spaniards. It is thus reasonable to expect that in large and territorially distant countries, such as Argentina which count with few consulates (six), Spaniards find it harder to register to vote and receive/send their ballot on time than in European countries such as France, which are geographically closer and count with more consulates (ten). Furthermore, the fact that France hosts not only Spaniards from the older outflows waves (who are also present in Argentina), but also many recent emigrants who left Spain since 2008, is an additional factor that could contribute to explaining the higher turnout rates from France when compared to Argentina.

4.2. (Non)Alignment in the Party Choices of Resident and Non-Resident Voters

The second dimension of electoral (non)alignment between resident and overseas voters refers to their party choices. As discussed, past studies have documented that certain parties receive different support among external and domestic voters (Lafleur and Sánchez-Domínguez, 2015; Goldberg and Lanz, 2019; Turcu and Urbatsch, 2020b). Yet, it is unclear which parties are favoured by the diaspora. In some cases, external voters vote more for opposition parties, whereas in others, parties in government receive stronger extra-territorial support (Fidrmuc and Doyle, 2005; Wellman, 2021). By ideology, European right-wing parties have been more attentive to emigration (Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019), but left-wing parties operating especially in contexts of strong party competition may also be inclined to develop specific strategies to attract overseas voters.

¹⁰ https://elpais.com/politica/2015/11/11/actualidad/1447245566_617893.html,

https://www.eldiario.es/politica/voto-electores-extranjero_1_1581043.html (last accessed 19/04/2022)

Figure 3 compares the evolution of the vote shares for incumbent, right-wing and non-statewide parties among resident and non-resident Spaniards. It shows that the party choices of these two groups have become more aligned in recent years, especially since 2015. Until 2015, Spaniards abroad usually returned stronger support for incumbent parties than resident Spaniards. Yet, the proportion of external votes for parties in government dropped after 2015 at an even higher rate than for resident voters. The political left has historically received stronger support from abroad, being the preferred option for overseas citizens at least until the 2000s. After the 2000s, however, the extra-territorial support for right-wing parties increased, with the diaspora's votes becoming more ideologically fragmented. Finally, both resident and non-resident voters returned a limited support for non-statewide parties, with overseas citizens being slightly less supportive of these parties than their resident counterparts until the 2000s.

[Figure 3 near here]

The distribution of the data by specific parties (Table 2) provides further insights to understand these findings.¹¹ It shows that, until 2015, external citizens' votes (similarly to residents' votes) mainly benefited the two mainstream parties, the left-wing Socialist Party (PSOE) and the conservative People's Party (PP). Yet, the extra-territorial support for PP has been historically lower than among resident voters, except for the 2004 elections in which Spaniards abroad were not equally exposed to the 2004 Madrid train bombings that took place three days before the election and changed the electoral results¹². In turn, and at least until the beginning of the 2000s, overseas citizens clearly supported the Socialist Party more than resident Spaniards.

[Table 2 near here]

¹¹ The distribution of the data on party choice by country of residence is not available.

¹² Pollsters were reporting a PP victory until the Madrid bombings.

Several factors explain the differentiated electoral success of these two mainstream parties outside Spain. Emigration has historically drawn the attention of both parties, which included electoral promises for non-resident citizens in their party manifestos (see Table 1A in Appendix) in the attempt to attract votes from abroad. Yet, whereas the references to the diaspora's rights have been less frequent and often more vague in PP's manifestos –especially until mid-1990s and from mid-2010s onwards– PSOE's manifestos have historically included a wide array of emigration-related proposals of socio-economic, political or cultural nature. For instance, electoral promises on facilitated return, the signature of bilateral agreements to ensure emigrants' social protection, special benefits for elderly Spaniards abroad/returnees, or ensuring diaspora representation via associations or consultative bodies were present in PSOE manifestos even before the 2000s.

Secondly, when in government, PSOE translated some of these proposals into legislation, via a series of legislative acts that extended the social, educational, cultural, and participation rights of emigrants and their descendants (Bermudez and Brey, 2017). In fact, most milestones for non-residents' rights were achieved during PSOE mandates in the 1980s and early 1990s, which helped to solidify the party's support from abroad. In turn, PP was held accountable for the budgetary cuts and policies implemented during its years in government in the attempt to reduce irregular immigration to Spain. Such measures also affected overseas Spaniards, for instance, by limiting their access to free healthcare in Spain, which raised serious discontent abroad (Bermudez and Brey, 2017). Regarding external voting, the legislative proposal for the 'begged vote' system was initiated by PSOE (together with Convergence and Union CiU and the Basque Nationalist Party PNV), with the support of PP. Yet, given the strong criticism received from abroad, PSOE changed its position and later proposed (in February 2021, together with Podemos) an initiative to abolish the requirement of electoral registration from abroad, while also being very explicit about this in its recent manifestos (Table 1A in Appendix). Meanwhile, PP started to challenge the 'begged vote' system in its manifestos only after moving to opposition in 2018.

Thirdly, PP and PSOE also signalled differently their interest in the Spanish diaspora by following different strategies in creating emigration agencies in their internal structure or party branches

abroad. Internally, PSOE created a specific party Secretariat for the Area of Migration Policies and PSOE Abroad, whereas PP has a lower profile Sectorial Commission on Emigration operating under its Secretary of International Relations. Moreover, while PSOE has a rather strong party presence abroad with 40 branches across 18 countries, PP only counts with 23 party branches in 11 countries (Table 2A in Appendix). All PP's extra-territorial delegations are in Europe, with a quarter of them in Germany. In turn, Socialist branches are present not only in European countries hosting large Spanish communities, but also in Latin America, especially in Argentina and Venezuela. Finally, the fact that overseas citizens were less supportive of PP could also be linked to how emigrants who left Spain during the dictatorship –and which still represent an important share of the electorate abroad– could have refrained from voting for the Popular Alliance (*Alianza Popular*, the electoral coalition from which PP was created) given its connections to Francoist elites.

In any case, Spaniards' party choices at home and abroad changed significantly since 2015, with the emergence of new parties that challenged the traditional left-right divide in Spanish politics, while also adding a new layer of increased party competition. Among left-wing parties, many resident and non-resident Spaniards shifted their votes from PSOE to the newly emerged Podemos, with external voters being more supportive of Podemos than domestic voters.

Podemos entered Spanish politics with a strong anti-establishment stance and a pro-active strategy to seek emigrants' votes. It quickly created a strong party structure abroad that operates via the Podemos circles. Currently, 35 such circles exist across 20 countries that are major destinations for the diaspora (Table 2A in Appendix). Its presence abroad is particularly widespread in the UK, France, and Germany, countries hosting the largest numbers of those leaving Spain after 2008 and to which Podemos has paid particular attention since its creation. The party also created specific cross-country working groups aiming to identify solutions for emigrants' problems (Rashkova and Van der Staak, 2020); and a special diaspora forum (Agora Abroad) bringing together overseas party supporters. Emigration-related issues have been highly salient in Podemos' manifestos (Table 1A in Appendix). They have included promises for eliminating the 'begged vote' system, creating a new electoral district abroad, providing universal healthcare coverage for returnees, special language programs overseas,

pension exportability, special agreements with Latin America to protect emigrants' rights, etc. Although Podemos received strong extra-territorial support for the first two elections held after its creation, such support dropped in 2019, at the expense of an increase in the overseas vote share for PSOE. This may be due to the overall drop in Podemos support given its overexposure in traditional media, the party crisis that led to the split of a more centrist *Más País*, and the inclusion of United Left in the electoral coalition.

As for changes affecting the right side of the ideological spectrum, the support for PP both in Spain and abroad also decreased significantly since 2015. Many PP supporters shifted their vote to the new competitor *Ciudadanos* (Cs), which also emerged as an alternative for right-wing external voters who were discontent with PP's policies that limited the diaspora's rights. In fact, whereas overseas Spaniards usually voted less for PP than resident voters, the vote share for Cs was slightly higher abroad than in Spain. Interestingly enough, *Ciudadanos* benefitted from extra-territorial support without any particular effort to reach out to overseas voters: the party has not created branches abroad or any internal body specifically focused on emigration (Table 2A in Appendix), nor did it pay much attention to the diaspora during electoral campaigns (Bermudez and Brey 2017) or in its electoral manifestos (Table 1A in Appendix). Something similar occurred with Vox, a new radical right party with a strong anti-immigrant position that obtained representation in the Spanish parliament after the April 2019 elections, due to an unexpected electoral support in Spain and abroad. Although emigration was completely absent from Vox electoral manifestos (Table 1A in Appendix) and the party does not seem to have any specific agencies for overseas citizens¹³, it has publicly criticised the 'begged vote' regulations and some of its members presented their candidacy for the Council of Spanish Residents Abroad¹⁴.

¹³ Vox does provide on its website a contact form for their branches abroad, referring to 46 locations, but without any further details available that could indicate that party branches exist in such locations.

¹⁴ <https://www.publico.es/politica/vox-busca-colarse-diaspora-espanola-primeras-asociaciones-compatriotas.html> (last accessed 19/04/2022)

5. Concluding Remarks

This article aimed to assess if external voters display a different electoral behaviour when compared to domestic voters, while also enquiring about the factors that could account for potential divergence between these two segments of the electorate. Despite the growing richness of the literature on extra-territorial franchise, the topic of the electoral (non)alignment between overseas and resident voters received limited scholarly attention. We contributed to address this research gap by providing new insights from the Spanish case. Spain is a particularly relevant case study for these purposes, given its prolonged emigration, the sizeable (and increasingly diverse) population abroad, and the shifting regulations on external voting that recently made it harder to cast the ballot from abroad.

We argued that a comprehensive understanding of electoral (non)alignment between resident and non-resident voters must consider two different analytical facets: first, potential similarities/differences in their turnout rates and second, potential convergence/divergence in their party choices. Our findings reveal interesting patterns in both dimensions.

First, we demonstrated that although Spaniards abroad and in Spain enjoy voting rights in Spanish elections, their participation levels are far from being aligned. Turnout from abroad was consistently lower than in-country turnout for general elections, but the introduction of the ‘begged vote’ system in 2011 further widened this gap. Secondly, although external turnout has significantly been hindered by the new requirement to register from abroad to vote in Spanish elections, the ‘begged vote’ system had uneven effects for Spaniards settled in different world regions. Participation was much lower from territorially distant countries in Latin America (especially Argentina, that hosts the largest number of overseas Spaniards) than from Europe. Such differences can be partly explained by the delays in sending/receiving the electoral documentation by post outside Europe in a short time; and the limited capacity of Spanish consulates in non-European countries to handle the requests of a very sizeable diaspora, particularly in Latin America. In turn, the higher external turnout from European countries – especially Germany, the UK or Switzerland – seems further incentivised by the different profile of

Spaniards residing in these countries (more highly educated young people, many of whom recently emigrated while still keeping very close ties with Spain).

Thirdly, contrary to past studies showing that European diasporas' rights are promoted by right-wing parties (Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019; Østergaard-Nielsen *et al.*, 2019), our analysis indicates that the Spanish political left has been much more attentive to emigrants' demands than its right-wing counterparts. Both PSOE and Podemos designed more pro-active strategies to reach out to overseas Spaniards than the conservative PP or, more recently, *Ciudadanos*. In turn, external voters also showed stronger support for left-wing parties than domestic voters. Finally, our findings also demonstrate an increased alignment in the party choices of resident and non-resident Spaniards in recent years. The Spanish political landscape changed with the emergence of new parties (Podemos, Cs, Vox). Faced with new alternatives on both sides of the ideological spectrum, many Spaniards abroad and in Spain shifted their preferences, with Podemos attracting many votes from traditional PSOE supporters, while Cs and Vox did so from the conservative PP.

Overall, these findings suggest that understanding the electoral (non)alignment between external and domestic voters requires paying attention not only to the evolution of their turnout rates and party choices over time, but also to the interplay between external voting regulations, diaspora characteristics, and parties' strategies towards the overseas electorate.

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