COMPETING FOR THE EMIGRANT VOTE.

A COMPARISON OF POLITICAL PARTIES’ TRANSNATIONAL ELECTORAL STRATEGIES IN SPAIN

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Abstract: Relations between political parties and voters are usually analysed in a national framework. However, in the wake of international emigration a growing number of countries have granted their citizens residing abroad the right to vote in the elections of their countries of origin. In the case of Spain, emigrants have been granted such voting rights since 1978 and an estimated 1.5 million emigrant voters can participate in Spanish elections. This paper analyses how Spanish political parties have confronted the challenge of having substantial parts of the electorate reside abroad with a particular emphasis on their transnational election campaigns in 2008 and 2011. To that end we propose a framework of analysis comprising the political programmes, organizational structures and campaign events in order to compare the level of transnational mobilization of the main political parties. We explore to what extent there are both logics of vote seeking (overall support and closeness of the result) and path-dependency at play in the transnational outreach of political parties.

1 Preliminary draft, please do not quote or circulate. In this version the case of Romania is missing instead concentrating on the case of Spain. A fuller version of this paper may be circulated to the other panelists before the conference so please contact either of the authors if you wish to have it forwarded.
Introduction:

Political parties have often been heralded as crucial to the functioning of modern representative democracy. It is therefore timely to explore their role in cross-border democratic processes of external voting of mobile citizens. The right of citizens to continue voting in their country of citizenship after immigrating to another country is not a new phenomenon. Yet transnational electoral rights and practices are attracting a growing amount of attention among both academics and policy makers. In part this may relate back to the fact that a growing number of emigrant countries have granted their citizens residing abroad the right to continue to vote in elections from afar during the last decades (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Ellis et. Al. 2007; Collyer 2011; Gamlen 2008; Lafleur 2011). Moreover, the transnational turn in migration studies have drawn attention to the fact that migrants may continue to be interested in the politics of their country of origin even decades after settling somewhere else (Basch et. Al 1994; Vertovec 1999)

Within the field of migrant transnational politics, scholars have since long highlighted that political parties make their presence felt among enfranchised emigrant collectives, not least in cases where a very large group of voters from one country is concentrated in another, such as the Mexicans and various Latin American migrant collectives in the US (Lafleur 2012, Smith 2008). More recent work highlights the strategies of Italian political parties (Tintori 2012) and discusses their different levels of discourse and engagement (Lafleur 2011). However, there is still a need for more systematic analysis of variance across parties and countries. It therefore seems timely to strengthen the dialogue with more general political party research to discuss which concepts and hypothesis that may explain the transnational behaviour of political parties.

In this paper the existence of different types of external voting rights is the point of departure for an analysis of how these rights are implemented by the political parties. More specifically we are not concerned with why certain countries extend political franchise to emigrants (Gamlen 2008; Lafleur 2011; Rhodes and Harutyunyan 2010). We will also not engage with the more normative inquiry regarding if emigrants should continue to have the right to vote in a country where they no longer reside and what might be the most democratically sound ways of facilitating this vote on par with mechanisms of control employed at the national level (Baubock 2006; Rubio-Marín 2006). Instead we focus on how the granting of external voting rights influences the behaviour of political parties in the country of origin. To what extent do political parties engage with the electorate residing abroad? What are their main interests regarding the external electorate and how are these interests weighed against the cost of transnational electoral mobilization? What are the main electoral strategies for capturing the emigrant vote? How may we explain differences among the level of transnational mobilization of major political parties in an emigrant country?
The term external voting rights cover a range of different electoral systems and technicalities (Ellis et. Al, 2007). In terms of electoral systems one of the main differences is between those systems where emigrants have the right to elect their own representatives and those where they vote directly for the parties in the countries of origin. In the case of special representatives, the emigrants are divided into a number of external constituencies corresponding to the number of seats reserved for their candidates in the parliament. The candidates competing in these external constituencies may be representatives from parties in the country of origin or independent candidates emanating from the emigrant collectives. This is the system employed in countries such as Italy since 2001, Romania since 2008 and France since 2008. In case there are no special representatives, emigrants are inscribed in their districts or capital city of origin and their vote is simply added to the domestic vote. This is the system in countries like Spain and means that the emigrant vote may carry important weight in voting districts with high rates of emigrant populations, such as in Galicia (Lugilde 2010). The technicalities of external voting, including the particular form of registration and voting (postal, in consulates, etc.) also differ among countries and have often been, as will be described below in the case of Spain, criticized for being open to fraud and abuse.

The dynamics of external voting and transnational campaigning are interesting for several reasons. Among these reasons are not that emigrants are very numerous or tend to turn out to vote on election day in relatively higher proportions than at the national level. Indeed, recent overviews of external voting rights demonstrate how emigrant voters often constitute a marginal percentage of the overall national vote. Added to this their turnout is often low compared to the overall figures for the national elections (Ellis et. al 2007; Lafleur 2012; Tintori 2012). However, empirically, this vote has often attracted media attention when it has proved to be ‘decisive’ through granting just that extra seat necessary for a particular party to enter government. This has been the case in Italy in 2006, in Romania in 2009 and more recently in the regional elections of Asturias in 2012 (ABC, 03.04.2012)

Moreover, given the increased mobility of citizens, political rights across borders is likely to become a growing phenomenon to which political actors both in the country of origin and residence have to adapt. The following discussions of how to explain the transnational mobilization of political parties seeks to understand the challenge that migration and cross border democratic processes pose for political parties. It is thus a first step towards further understanding the mechanisms of adaptability of parties to an ever-changing environment which is not just national but also transnational.

In the following pages we present a discussion of some of the conceptual and methodological challenges related to the study of the strategies of political parties towards emigrant voters. We then present a series of preliminary findings from the case of Spain and in the conclusions we return to a series of considerations on how party
behaviour differs in the transnational realm. The findings are based on an ongoing largely qualitative research project on external citizenship and political parties in Spain, France, Italy, and Romania. The project includes extensive analysis of parliamentary debates, party political programmes and other campaign material, analysis of voting behaviour and interviews with selected representatives of political parties and emigrant representatives.

Conceptual and methodological challenges in the study of transnational mobilization of political parties

Despite the growing competition from other political actors, political parties remain a crucial institution connecting citizens with governments in processes of representation (Dalton, et Al. 2011). There is no shortage of studies and research fields dealing with how and why and with what consequences political parties mobilize voters. These political strategies are, however, usually analysed in a national framework. In the following sections we reflect on the extent to which some of these nation-bound frameworks of analysis may also capture dynamics of transnational mobilization efforts. Already from the outset it is clear that the literature that deals with campaigns as an independent variable is difficult to apply to a range of cases because data on voter-preferences, or even turnout per country of residence as in the case of Spain, is simply not available. We therefore centre on the transnational mobilization of the political parties as a dependent variable along two core questions: First, to what extent do political parties engage with the emigrants abroad than other parties do? Second, among those parties that do ‘go transnational’, what are their main motives and strategies for targeting the emigrant voters? We follow this by a discussion of the elements of a framework of how to explain variance among the level of transnational mobilization among political parties.

Transnational mobilization

There are many terms available for describing the process whereby political parties seek electoral support. In this paper we employ the term mobilization to denote both the more intensified windows of electoral campaign preceding the election date and the general attempts of parties to communicate with and organize their transnational electoral support.

The relationship between political parties and voters has been thoroughly addressed by a large and diverse scholarship. A wealth of studies have highlighted how

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2 This paper is part of the project ‘Migration, Citizenship and Political Parties’, funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation between 2011-2013
political parties are adapting to dynamics of changing and more volatile voter-party alignment, albeit with varying success (Mair et. al. 2004). One consequence in terms of party organization are more centralized and professionalized party organizations in constant campaign mode (Dalton et. Al. 2011; Mair et al. 2004; Müller and Strom 1999). Another consequence, in terms of electoral strategies and campaigns, is how parties have shifted towards more professionalized or ‘Americanized’ campaigns relying on media impact, opinion polls, more personalized or ‘presidentialized’ campaign messages (Poguntke and Webb 2005; Norris 2005). To this period of a ‘new era of uncertainty’ (Norris, 2005) can be added the digitalization of electoral strategies whereby more and more communication is taking place through webpages and social media. One overall question is to what extent the transnational mobilization of the external vote needs to be located in all these structural changes. Before answering that question it is first important to identify and clarify some of the core differences between the domestic and transnational electoral dynamics. In the following we focus on a framework that divides the transnational mobilization into overall dimensions of a) political programmes and policy commitment in parliament; b) organizational structure and c) campaign events and strategies. Cross cutting these three dimensions is an evaluation of the extent to which the parties are ‘chasing’ up new voters.

In terms of the political message that political parties send to emigrant voters one immediate observation is that strictly speaking the ‘ideological linkage’ (Dalton et. Al, 2011) does not have to be different between parties and external voters than it is at the national stage. That is to say, in external electoral systems without special representatives, as in the case of Spain, there is no reason why parties should direct a particular message at the emigrants. The enfranchisement of the external electorate, in particular in a time of ‘Americanized campaigning’ would simply mean that emigrants would orient themselves in the national campaign material and vote for the party that best correspond to their political preferences in the country of origin. However, the enfranchisement of emigrants often happens decades after the emigration and settlement of emigrants who have a particular set of problems to solve and so the point is to understand to what extent parties address these needs. In this paper we will focus on the extent to which political parties start formulating particular emigrant related policies for their campaign programmes and the extent to which political parties defend these policies in parliament.

In terms of organizational structure and strategies one could suppose that transnational campaigning should be easier in the age of digital communication. It is no more difficult to log on to the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) face book page from Buenos Aires than from Madrid. Similarly, national mass media is often globally available for anyone with an internet connection and the right language skills. However, evidence suggest that mainly local campaigning still feature in the activities of political parties and tend to have an influence at election day (Dalton et. Al 2011). Indeed, direct contact with a candidate or party worker has been found to be the potentially most
important campaign activity in terms of influencing turnout and voter preferences of citizens (Ibid, 69).

It is therefore interesting to scrutinize to what extent political parties extend this logic to the external electorate in terms of committing resources to campaigning abroad. In the following analysis we look at several dimensions of party political strategies. In terms of transnational organization we include both the extent to which political parties have set up internal divisions for representing the emigrant voter preferences within the party and the extent to which they have set up external party offices to represent the political party among the emigrant collectives in their respective countries of residence. In terms of strategies we look at the extent to which political parties commit resources to participate in campaign events on the ground in the countries of residence.

Cross cutting the analysis of these different strategies we furthermore evaluate the dynamics of competition in the transnational mobilization of political parties. That is, the extent to which political parties, once they have decided to mobilize the external electorate, also try to capture voters beyond their traditional voter base. Rohrschneider (2002) divides targeting strategies into a continuum between mobilizing and chasing. The mobilizing party emphasizes its ideological heritage in its programme which is mainly addressed to its core voters and constituencies. Similarly, it uses its organization and campaign instruments to contact already aligned voters rather to attract new ones. By contrast the chasing party is aimed at attracting unaligned voters, prioritizing the maximization of its vote-share over ideology when designing its programme and using organizational innovation as a campaign theme to emphasize its electoral attractiveness (Rohrschneider 2002). The main hypothesis is that most parties will employ a mix of mobilizing and chasing (Albright 2008; Rohrschneider 2002). Especially the vote-maximizing parties will try to balance the recruitment of new voters with a continued commitment mobilizing their core supporters.

The analysis of such strategic considerations may also be extended into the transnational electoral mobilization. In other words, it is relevant to not just investigate to what extent parties formulate electoral strategies to address the emigrant voters but also to what extent they engage in chasing voters outside their core external constituencies. The transnational dynamics differ from the national dynamics in several important ways though. First, parties have much less knowledge of voter preferences. They can mainly base their analysis of voter preferences on past electoral results and input from those supporters affiliated with the party. The latter gives them an idea of what their voters want – but not what other non-aligned emigrants might find attractive. Second, the party system may differ in the external electoral mobilization rendering the competition different than at the national level where more parties are competing.

In order to evaluate the extent to which parties are attempting to not just mobilize aligned voters but also expand their electoral support we suggest looking at the following indicators: To what extent do political parties they expand their programme to
attract new voters over time – or reformulate image of voters to a broader category? Or do they keep emphasizing ideology and historical commitment to a particular socio-economic group? Do political parties seek to expand their transnational infrastructure of already aligned organizations -- or seek new platforms and venues setting up a different transnational infrastructure?

Why do parties decide to mobilize the emigrant vote?

The analysis of political mobilization needs to be located in its particular context of institutions, events and configurations of actors which may influence both the repertoire and success of political parties (Kriesi 2012). In order to extend this to the external electoral field, it is necessary to define the interest of political parties in the transnational realm. We hypothesize that there are two overall logics/dynamics at play in the transnationalization of political strategies of parties once external voting rights are in place: vote seeking rationale and path-dependency.

Vote seeking rationale: The primary logic here is a cost-benefit analysis where parties balance the expected electoral return with the cost of mobilizing voters. As noted in other studies of external voting rights (Ellis et. Al. 2007; Lafleur 2012) parties face the problem of high campaign costs required by an external electorate dispersed in many countries of residence whose political preferences are largely un-polled. The calculation of the parties leading to more transnationalization would therefore be related to the following two core conditions:

- The sentiment pool/voter support: First, there is the more general perception of the size of the sentiment pool understood as the aggregate of individuals who share common grievances and attributional orientations (Snow et al. 1986: 467 as cited in Muñoz and Guinjoan 2012). In the case of external voting rights this is mainly based on electoral results of previous elections. Parties with a relatively large support have more incentive to keep and extend this electoral base while parties with little support have less of an incentive to do so. However, while parties need votes to survive, then the emigrant vote is often marginal in the overall national context and not usually crucial to survival. An even more important incentive for parties is therefore:

- The closeness of the race, which refers to the idea that the closer the expected outcome the more intensity can be expected among the political parties involved (Przeworski 1986; Kriesi et al. 2012). According to Przeworski (1986) political parties do not need to mobilize when their success is guaranteed, and have no incentive to mobilize if they have no chance of capturing any votes. However, in the case of the external vote there are times when this vote is perceived as tipping the balance of the
result, parties have an incentive to launch themselves into campaigns also in the transnational space.

Path-dependency: In our analysis all parties are seeking the vote, but there may be more logics at play than a simple cost-benefit calculation involved in the transnational mobilization of political parties. Basically there may also be a certain path dependency at play in the transnational network of political parties which means that they sustain lines of communication and a commitment of policy representation or ideological linkage with their external voters even when this is unlikely to pay off in terms of overall electoral results. In other words, once a party has extended a series of policy commitment to the emigrant voters and, in particular, once a political party has established a transnational organizational infrastructure with party offices abroad and a central coordinating office, then these commitments and structures are not easily dismantled.

Accordingly, the implementation of external voting rights in a country of origin is a necessary but not a sufficient incentive for political parties to extend their mobilization to emigrant voters. Parties are more likely to gear up their act when they sense that the benefits are higher than the cost. By extension smaller and less resourceful parties are less likely to meet the cost of transnational mobilization of the external vote. As a result different party systems may exist in national and transnational electoral mobilization as only the main parties are able to go abroad.

By the same logic, once the cost of setting up a transnational infrastructure for communication with emigrants is in place there may be a tendency to keep the machinery running even when there is no perception of a closeness of the race. Some political parties are likely to keep up the policy commitment and transnational mobilization even when the electoral system for the external vote is changed reducing the turnout or type of elections in which the emigrants can vote.

In the following pages we present the case of transnational mobilization among political parties in Spain. We begin by presenting the historical and current context of the external citizenship legislation and one of the key independent variables: voter turnout and the closeness of the result because this gives some of the necessary background for readers unfamiliar with external voting rights in the Spanish context. We then proceed to analyse the transnational mobilization of the political parties along the dimensions outlined above: political programmes, policy commitment, organizational changes and the organization of campaign events.
Spanish emigration and external citizenship

Emigration has characterized the Spanish society for centuries. However, it is between the second half of the 19th century and the fall of Franco’s dictatorship that it reached its peak. There are several migratory waves during this period and it is relevant to notice that two of them are embedded in specific socio-economic contexts: the Civil War in the 1930s and the economic emigration starting with the 1960s. The political exiles migrated mainly to Latin America and Europe. In many cases they reproduced their political preferences and militancy in the countries of destination. The economic migration to Western Europe has also been characterized by the reconstruction of political allegiances with home country political organizations. It is no surprise then that the Spanish Socialists in France celebrated their 100th anniversary in 2009 (interview PSOE Paris, 10.02.12) or that the Izquierda Unida (IU) dates back their links with the Spaniards abroad to the end of the Civil War, when many Spanish communists fled the Franco regime (interview IU, 04.06.12).

In spite of the politicization of the Spanish diaspora and of frustrated attempts to gain external voting rights and special representation in the parliament (Lugilde 2011: 45ff), it is not until the instauration of democracy that the Spaniards abroad have been granted external voting rights. The first time the Spaniards could vote from abroad was at the referendum on the Political Reformation from 1976. The Constitution from 1978 stipulates the full equality of rights, including political rights, between resident and non-resident Spanish citizens. The real implementation of the constitutional provisions is in the form of the Electoral Law of 1985 (LO 5/1985). This law stipulates the right of the non-resident Spaniards to vote in local, regional, general and European elections by post. The votes are counted in the last constituency of residence of the elector.

The 1995 reform of the Electoral Law (LO 3/1995) introduces another provision that has significantly boosted the size of the external electoral census. It establishes the automatic registration in the Census of the External Electors (CERA in Spanish) for the regional, general and European elections. In practice, this presupposed that all the Spaniards registered in the CERA received at home, without prior request, the voting bulletins before each regional, national or European election. In the case of local elections, they had to make a special request first in order to receive the voting bulletins. As figure 1.1 shows, the non-resident electors multiplied eight times in two decades. In 2011 there were more than 1,600,000 Spanish nationals living abroad, the main destination countries being Argentina with more than 330,000 Spanish residents, followed by France (171,000), Venezuela (145,000), Germany (88,248) and

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3 Preamble of the Law of Spanish External Citizenry, 40/2006
4 ibid
5 The law also establishes that the votes from abroad be sent by post until the day before the election and be received and counted in the following five days after the election, except in the case of local elections. In this case, the votes from abroad have to be sent to the constituency of the last place of residence and counted together with the domestic votes in the same day of the election.
Switzerland (75,350). It is important to notice that although the census of the external electors comprises 4% of the Spanish electoral census, in some regions the electors abroad make up to 14% of the total census. Thus, in 2011 in Galicia, the census of the non-resident citizens represents 14.2% of the total regional census. Other regions with more than five percent of external voters are Asturias (8.89%), Canary Islands (6.63%), Castilla y Leon (5.47%), Cantabria (5.81%).

**Figure 1.1 Number of non-resident electors registered in CERA between 1986-2011**

![Census of the external electors (CERA)](image)

Source: Ministry of the Interior

The most recent modification of the electoral law from 2011 puts a break on the expansionist trend of the external voting rights legislation. It introduces the ‘vote by request’, which means that the voting bulletins are not sent by default to all CERA registries, but only to those who send a special request within twenty days before the election. It also suppresses the right to vote in local elections for the non-resident Spaniards, on par with granting local voting rights for foreign residents from several third countries with which Spain signed bilateral agreements on the matter. This change in legislation had a strong negative impact on the turnout from abroad and raised criticism and protest of the emigrant communities. As figure 1.2 illustrates, the turnout fell from 33 percent to less than 5 percent after the implementation of the vote by request.

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6 No official data available between 1978-1986
Transnational voting patterns at the national level

It has been argued that Spanish external voters do not display a constant political preference over time, and that they tend to vote with the incumbent party (Lugilde, 2010). As figures 1.3 and 1.4 show, the Popular Party (PP) and the PSOE have alternated in the voting preferences of the emigrants, while the IU decreased from 10 percent of the votes in 1986 to less than 2 percent in 2008. However, the 2011 national elections do not necessarily sustain this hypothesis. The PP and the PSOE shared a similar proportion of the external vote (37% and 38% respectively). At the same time, the IU increased their electoral support from less than 2% in 2008 to more than 6% in 2011. By consequence, the 2011 results display a slight convergence between the domestic and the external electorate political behaviour. As in the case of the domestic vote, the PSOE lost important percentages in the overall results of the election, although the domestic voters ‘punished’ them much more than the external voters did. Meanwhile the PP almost equalled the PSOE vote abroad. The IU raised its vote share

In the following sections we do not include all the political parties in Spain neither at the national nor at the regional level. The main reason is that this is still research in progress and we still need to complete our data set on a range of smaller national parties and regional parties from autonomous communities with ‘less’ emigrant voting dynamics. The following analysis therefore mainly focuses on the parties that have taken a noticeable position regarding emigrant voting rights namely the three main parties with a national level of organization, the PP, PSOE and IU and two regional parties, BNG and Canary Coalition (CC). The information on the latter two parties is in this draft not complete.
both in the domestic and the external electorate. The disenchantment with the PSOE’s handling of the economic crisis in the 2008-2011 legislature, as well as the chasing strategy of the PP since 2008 are some of the likely factors that may explain the PP’s rise among the external electorate. At the same time, the IU increased its vote share both at home and abroad. In their own interpretation this was due to the fact that many voters saw the IU as an alternative to the (disappointing) mainstream parties’ politics (interview IU, 04.06.12).

**Figure 1.3** Voting patterns of non-resident Spaniards for PP, PSOE and IU between 1986-2000 (in percentages out of the total external vote)

![Graph showing voting patterns of non-resident Spaniards for PP, PSOE, and IU between 1986-2000.](image)

Source: Ministry of the interior

**Figure 1.4** Voting patterns of resident and non-resident Spaniards for PP, PSOE and IU between 1986-2011 (in percentages out of the total vote and out of the external vote respectively)

![Graph showing voting patterns of resident and non-resident Spaniards for PP, PSOE, and IU between 1986-2011.](image)
Source: Ministry of the Interior

Closeness of the results

Although the share of the external electorate does not go above 5% of the Spanish electoral census, there are several occasions where it has been decisive and changed the configuration of the seats in the regional and even in the national parliament. The cases where the emigrant vote actually mattered in national elections are scarce, but it is worth reminding that for example in Canarias the Canary Coalition (CC) won a senator in 2008 after the count of the emigrant vote (El Pais, 17.03.2008). The CC has also been the most voted political force in the 2003 and 2007 regional elections among the external electorate, winning more than 50% of the vote. However, due to the fact that only few emigrants of Canarian origin were able to send their request for the vote in the 2011 regional elections, the party lost an important number of potential supporters.

Figure 1.5 Voting patterns of non-resident citizens in regional elections in Canary Islands 1995-2011, in percentages of the total external vote in Canary Islands

![Graph showing voting patterns in Canary Islands elections from 1995 to 2011](source: España Exterior)

It is not uncommon that the emigrant vote proves to be decisive, especially in regions with a high percentage of external voters, as for example Galicia, Asturias, Basque Country or Canary Islands. The most recent example is the case of Asturian elections, when the PSOE obtained a decisive seat in the regional parliament and was able to form the regional government with the votes from the emigrants. Argentina, also called ‘the fifth Galician province’ has been the electoral battlefield of socialist and PP candidates for two decades already. The National Galician Bloc (BNG) lost one seat in the regional parliament in 1997 after the count of the external vote, as well as its only MEP in the European Parliament elections of 2004. This is a period where the BNG voices a lot of discontent with the external elections, reporting cases of fraud and undemocratic
practices in the external election polls since 1989. These European elections are also the first signal of the Socialist victory among the Galician abroad. As figure 1.6 shows, the PP was the most voted party by the external electorate in 1997 and 2001. However, the PSOE increased their external vote share from 20% in 2001 to 42% in 2005. Consequently, the PP lost the absolute majority and the coalition PSOE-BNG took control of the regional government.

Figure 1.6 Voting patterns of non-resident citizens in regional elections in Galicia 1997-2009, in percentages of the total external vote in Galicia

![Voting patterns of non-resident citizens in regional elections in Galicia 1997-2009, in percentages of the total external vote in Galicia](image)

Source: España Exterior

The voting patterns and closeness of the result at the regional level show that the external voter support for the PP, PSOE and IU fluctuates over time, likely influenced by the incumbency factor and socio-economic changes among the emigrant voters. The main point is that political parties cannot take their support among the external voters for granted. In the following sections we analyse to what extent political parties have tried to consolidate or expand their electoral support among emigrant voters.

**Transnational mobilization of political parties**

Mobilization at the transnational is no less of a complex and multi-facetted phenomenon than it is at the national scene. In the analysis of the extent to which political parties engage in transnational electoral strategies and with what dynamics and motives, we include the dimensions of a) to what extent they include electoral promises for emigrants in their political programmes, b) to what extent they have defended these policy commitment in parliamentary debates as illustrated in the debates of the change in external voting rights up to the change of legislation in 2010; c) the

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8 No data available before 1997
transnationalization of party organization in the form of internal and external offices to coordinate the transnational mobilization, d) the campaign events during the general elections campaigns in 2008 and 2011 an indicator of the resources that parties’ commit to transnational mobilization.

Party positioning on emigrants as long-distance citizens

Special provisions related to emigrants in general elections programmes:

External voting rights have led to a growing interest by political parties, but with shifting emphasis and perceptions of who these emigrant voters are. If we look at the political programmes of parties, concepts as “emigration”, “Spaniards around the world” or “Spaniards residing abroad” have been applied in order to approach the emigrated communities. The PP, the PSOE and the IU have had special policies in their political programmes since the 1982 elections. At the beginning of the 1980s the parties approached emigrants as both workers living abroad and returnees. Most of the electoral proposals covered the areas of welfare, education and consular administration. All parties promised to improve the participation of the non-resident citizens. Yes, it was the IU that first proposed the creation of a special constituency for the Spaniards abroad that would have special representation in both chambers. By the late 1980s the political parties seem to lose interest in the emigrant voters as the programmes of all parties make less reference to the non-resident nationals from the late 1980s and up through the 1990s. Indeed, the 1989 and 1993 PSOE programmes do not have any reference to emigration at all. The PP reserve only a few general lines to the emigrants in their 1989 programme, promising a better connection with them, while the 1993 programme has no special provision regarding emigration whatsoever. In contrast to its comprehensive provisions for the emigrants in the 1993 campaign, the IU makes none in its 1996 programme. After this relative period of oblivion the parties continue to expand their promises regarding Spaniards living abroad starting with 2000 when the number of registered voters in the CERA increases from 500,000 to 900,000. Moreover, in tandem with this renewed interest expressed in the political programmes, there is an important shift in terms of the wording of the programmes. Generally, they begin to speak less about emigration and more about Spaniards around the world or Spaniards resident abroad. This indicates a shift from seeing emigrants as exclusively future returnees to a perception of permanently settled Spanish citizens abroad akin to that witnessed in a series of other emigrant (Smith 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003)

While the regional parties do not dedicate special measures to emigrants in their programmes for the general elections, they do have comprehensive proposals in their political programmes for regional elections. In May 2011, both the BNG and the CC have proposals regarding healthcare, social assistance and educational programmes abroad. The BNG also tries to reach the emigrant entrepreneurs of Galician descent in order to make facilities for their economic investment in their community of origin. But
while the BNG calls for a ‘real depuration of the Census of external electors’ and the implementation of the vote in person in order to combat the electoral fraud, the CC calls for the re-establishment of the local voting rights for emigrants and the improvement of participatory mechanisms. The CC stresses in its programme that it was one of the few parties defending the local voting rights for emigrants and asks for a revision of the electoral law.

The shift in the conceptualization of the external migrant communities as expressed in the political programme coincides on the one hand with an extension of the electoral promises regarding emigration and on the other hand with an extended definition of the groups of voters targeted. The parties no longer only mobilize the core electorate of the emigrant workers but seek to chase new categories of voters, as for example the ‘young Spaniards resident abroad’ or the ‘emigrant entrepreneurs’. The programmes also begin to convergence more. For instance, in the 2008 campaign all parties praised and took ownership of the implementation of the Law of Spanish external citizenry, the first comprehensive legislative framework regarding the non-resident Spaniards that brings together rights and measures in the areas of welfare (‘assistential9 pensions abroad, healthcare abroad), education, cultural rights and political participation rights. The IU and PSOE restated their commitment to the organization of a special constituency with parliamentary representation, while the PP promised to improve the voting conditions by the implementation of the vote in person. In 2011 the both leftist parties included the special representation provision, a long standing demand among emigrant representatives, while the most “popular” conservative proposal was the implementation of a health card for the Spaniards abroad in the same conditions as their resident compatriots.

While, all three parties started to target the young voters at the beginning of 2000, then it is in particular in the last two rounds of elections that they make more specific provisions for them. This includes for example extra funding and educational programmes. In 2008, the PSOE reach out to the business communities resident abroad by proposing the creation of an integrated communication platform of non-resident entrepreneurs. In the 2011 programme the PP follow suit by targeting the entrepreneurs who want to internationalize their activity or the Spanish-origin businessmen living abroad. The constant redefinition of both the message and the target groups related to the emigrant communities suggests the fact that the parties do not only make a commitment regarding emigration, but that they adapt to its ever-changing socio-economic profile. In other words, the expanded and converged list of themes in the party programmes indicate that parties are no longer just mobilising the emigrant

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9 Assistential pensions abroad refer to pensions that are granted to Spanish nationals residing abroad who are older than 65 and do not have sufficient resources.
w worker electoral support but chasing and competing for new groups of voters residing abroad. 

Defending electoral promises in the parliamentary debates

While the parties generally agree on a range of issues regarding the social and economic dimensions of external citizenship then the issue of the ‘vote by request’ continues to be a contested and disputed issue. The BNG is one of the main players in this process. The main point of a series of proposals from the Galician nationalists is a better control of the votes coming from abroad. The party had constantly brought to the public attention episodes of fraud that occurred during the local, regional and general elections. In 2005 they presented a proposal for the vote by request in general elections. The BNG was also calling for a better distribution of the campaign resources, so that all parties may campaign abroad. At this point in time, the PSOE agreed with the necessity of assuring the democratic quality of the external vote, although they made it clear that there was an undesired risk that the vote by request would lower the overall participation. The IU supported the BNG-PSOE proposals. On the other side, the conservatives firmly declared that they were open to reform the Electoral Law, but they were against the introduction of the vote by request. Their position was supported by the Basque and Catalan nationalists in the parliament.

The 2008-2011 legislature brings a new debate regarding the external vote. As usual, the BNG make a proposal in the parliament whose main points were to introduce the vote by request for the non-resident electors and suppress their right to vote in local elections. This time the proposal had the joint signature of the Galician conservatives, who were also calling for special measures that would impede the fraudulent practices related to the external vote. In contrast to their position in 2005, the PP was not only in favour of the vote by request, but also arguing for the suppression of the right to vote in local elections for non-residents. The PSOE argued in favour of both measures, considered to give a better legitimacy of the external vote. However, at the same time they considered that the implementation of the vote in person and the creation of a special constituency would overcome the deficiencies related to the external vote.

The common front against these proposals was taken by the CC, IU and Catalan Republican Left. While agreeing with the fact that the vote by request would introduce a better security regarding the external vote, these parties considered that the suppression of local voting rights for emigrants is an unjust measure. The IU argued that emigrants are entitled to vote in the localities of residence just as much as the immigrants are. The

10 The analysis of the CC and BNG programmes is in progress
12 Diario de Sesiones, Plenary debate 12.12.2006
Canary Coalition Party argued that many emigrants still have properties in the villages and towns they come from, and therefore they should have a say in their local politics. In spite of these voices, the Electoral Reform passed the parliament with a wide majority, causing an increased dissatisfaction of the emigrant representatives. However, after seeing the “disastrous” results of the vote by request after the 2011 elections, both the PP and the PSOE promised to revise the legislation and cancel the provision (interview PP Exterior, 01.12.2011; interview PSOE Secretaría Emigración, 05.06.2012)

In sum, the parties’ discourses and policy positions on emigration cannot be integrated in a coherent trend. While expanding their proposals on emigration, the mainstream parties decide to impose substantial barriers to the exercise of this vote in order to combat the undemocratic practices related to it. The following section presents the level of transnationalization beyond this discursive perspective, by analysing the extent to which the parties set up infrastructure abroad in order to better reach and communicate with their militants and supporters.

The transnationalization of the organizational structure of the political parties

The political programmes and the policy positioning are not the only fields where the parties took a stance on emigration. The organizational structure has also been redesigned in order to meet and channel the emigrant voice. The transnationalization of the organizational structure is made manifest both internally and externally. Regarding the transnationalization of the internal party organization, we may speak of two types of structures that the parties design in relation to emigration: departments or areas dedicated to emigrants’ concerns and/or special electoral campaign divisions coordinating the external campaign. In 2012 all three major parties have a department that relates to the emigrant communities, but this is a change that PP implemented in only in 2009 and PSOE in 2012.

The party with one of the oldest organizational structure that is related to the emigrant communities is the IU. As their coordinators explain, the Department of Migration inside the IU has been up and running since the 1980s (interview IU 04.06.2012). From the outset this department is responsible for both emigration and immigration. The IU considers that Spanish emigrants and immigrants in Spain have

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14 There are other institutionalized channels for dialogue with emigrants as for example the party conferences. As well, the parties get information through other institutionalized channels pertaining to the administration: The General Council of the External Citizens (CGCEE) and the Councils of Emigrants (CRE).
similar experiences during the migratory process and for that reason the party finds it important and beneficial to learn and to apply good practices in both fields. The PSOE only organized the Secretaría General de Emigración in early 2012. As its representatives explain, the emigrated communities have been in constant communication with the central party since decades. However, there was no special structure that would deal with emigration issues except during the electoral campaigns. In 2002 the party established a special division that used to be responsible to the coordination of the electoral campaign abroad, “which is totally different from the domestic one” (interview PSOE 26.01.2012; interview PSOE Secretaría General de Emigración 05.06.12).

The PP did not have a special department in charge of emigration until they established the PP Exterior in the fall of 2009, after the Galician elections. As one of its representatives declares, emigration has always been on the PP agenda, even if there was no special organizational structure dealing with it. The fact that president Rajoy comes from Galicia is presented as one of main explanatory factors for the PP’s creation of a special structure inside the party that would give voice to the emigrants and better channel their demands (interview PP exterior, 01.12.2011).

It is in the transnational organizational structures that we find the biggest differences among the parties. The IU is present in six countries of Northern Europe which was the destination of many labour emigrants at the beginning of the seventies. Their leaders maintain a constant contact with the organizations abroad but there have been no attempts to open up new offices abroad. Moreover, the IU recognizes that: ‘The chapters are weaker now, also because many emigrants returned and they are members of our organizations in Spain’ (interview IU, 05.06.12). Party representatives therefore declare that they are now setting up a project of identifying the new emigrants, highly skilled Spaniards that had to leave because of the economic crisis. However, they do not intend to open new offices, but rather to establish ‘contacts and networks’.

By contrast, the PSOE is present in 24 countries, with more than 30 offices. There is also a federal organization based in Brussels, called PSOE Europe which represents all the external party offices in Europe. The PSOE Europe was funded during the eighties, when the labour emigrants in northern Europe demanded a better organization and communication with the central office. There is no similar structure for the Latin American offices which are instead being coordinated directly from the centre. In spite of long-standing links with the Spanish emigrants resident abroad, the external organizations became more disconnected from the central party at the end of the eighties. When PSOE lost power in 1996, several leaders, especially Jose Blanco (another important politician of Galician descent) decided to reach out to the organizations abroad. Until 2003 the PSOE undertook extensive effort to extend and organize the PSOE network abroad. It is during this period (1996-2000) that the offices
in important countries such as Argentina and Uruguay have been re-established. (interview with PSOE Secretaria General de Emigracion, 23.01.2012).

The PP undertook a similar process a decade later. Between 2008 and 2010 the party led an extensive campaign to identify supporters and set up new chapters abroad. Thus, the number of offices abroad increased from being present in only six countries in 2008 to having more than 40 offices in 27 countries. At the same time, the central chapters as for example in Argentina or France have been reorganized and better equipped. The PP representatives admit that not all the 27 chapters abroad are physical offices, but that some of them are only “virtual”, with a supporter or group of supporter using their own office space to represent the party.. However, in the era of the new technologies, a virtual office can fulfil its functions just as much as a physical one, as the communication with the central party is constantly established (interview PP, 01.12.2011).

This analysis shows that both PSOE and PP, although at a 10 year distance, adapted and expanded their internal and external infrastructure in order to strengthen the links with their core supporters and reach new ones. The PSOE expansion of infrastructure abroad coincides with the renewed visibility of emigration in party electoral programmes after 2000. Moreover, the party established the PSOE Exterior department after a close race with PP regarding the external vote in the 2011 general elections. Meanwhile, the PP Exterior is funded after the defeat in the 2005 Galician elections and the decreasing support among the Galician diaspora after 2000. These measures denote the fact that the electoral competition among the two main parties at home and abroad determines them to expand their network across borders in order to chase new voters of various contexts of residence. In consequence, the parties do not only target new categories of voters by expanding their political proposals, but also by extending their territorial networks and organizations.

Transnational electoral campaign events

Transnational electoral campaigns are a complex affair often mixing central office strategies with initiatives by the local chapters. When asked about how they campaign abroad, the representative of PP Colombia said that they follow the central office guidelines, but that many times they have to adapt the propaganda and make it more ‘Colombian’ (interview PP Colombia 19.02.2012). This statement summarizes quite well the strategies of the external offices during the electoral campaign. During the most recent general election campaigns both PP and PSOE central offices set up a general plan that each external chapter can use as a point of reference. However, the external offices have considerable freedom to propose various activities and messages. Usually, the offices form a campaign committee that is in charge of the communication and planning. They first make contact with the core supporters of the party through mail and phone. Subsequently, the militants go to public spaces to put up electoral posters.
disseminate leaflets etc. During the Spanish electoral campaign, Buenos Aires resembles any other Spanish city, full of electoral posters, meetings and militants sharing electoral flyers. However, not all countries allow foreign electoral propaganda in their public spaces (see also Lafleur (2012)). In Colombia for example, the militants of the Spanish parties could not put posters (interview PP Colombia 19.02.2012). In France the socialists have been advised by the police to distribute the propaganda near their consulates, but not much further (Interview PSOE Paris 10.02.2012). In some countries the militants do “door to door campaign”, trying to identify new voters. This has been the practice of PP Colombia before the 2011 general elections and PSOE declares that they used to do it in several occasions, especially in Latin American cities.

For the 2011 elections the external campaign was twice as long as in previous years because of the newly implemented ‘registered vote’. As the voters had to request the vote maximum twenty days before the election day, many chapters abroad first made an information campaign, without any electoral propaganda and only subsequently did they forward the information they had received from the central party. For example, PSOE Argentina opened a call centre in Argentina in late September in order to inform the citizens about what they should do for the incoming general elections (España Exterior, 29.09.2011). PP Belgium organized a meeting in the central square of Brussels to inform the Spaniards how they should vote (España Exterior, 18.10.2011). This two-step campaign also had a filtering role and helped parties to concentrate where the real voting potential is located. This was most visible before the regional elections in May 2011, when no request from Venezuela reached the Spanish soil on time. And so Caracas, which used to be a place of pilgrimage for most of the parties from Spain, was completely ignored during the rest of the campaign (España Exterior, 10.05.2011). However, previous to the campaign period, the politicians from Canary Island had travelled back and forth between the island and Venezuela. As the newspapers report, in April 2011 all three main parties from Canary Islands (CC, PP and PSOE) had sent their candidates to meet the external voters in Venezuela and Brazil and inform them that they had to request the vote. (España Exterior 12.04.2011)

The physical spaces that the parties use are not restricted to their offices and to the public plazas. The associations, various regional organizations and the offices or meeting halls lent by peer parties in the country of residence are some of the focal points of the campaign. Associations and radio stations from the country of residence may invite representatives of the party to participate in debates during the campaign.

A very high profile part of the campaign abroad is when important figures from Spain go and visit the external communities. The party chapters abroad propose several names and the central offices try to squeeze in the visits to external voters in otherwise busy campaign agendas of party big wigs. However, as our interviewees declare, the

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15 The regional elections in May 2011 took place in all autonomous communities except for Catalonia, Galicia, the Basque Country and Andalucia.
visits from Spain are not limited only to the electoral period. Almost every time a Spanish politician visits an American or European country, they also try to make space for an encounter with the emigrant communities. The PSOE representative estimates that such visits do not necessarily attract new voters, but they carry a very symbolic message of party concern for the external voters.

For instance, the end of 2007 was a busy period for the Spanish voters in Argentina and Uruguay. In November they received the visit of the Spanish had of government Zapatero who met president Kirchner and also the supporters from emigrant communities. Zapatero made a summary of the achievements of his latest mandate, including the Law of the External citizenry, the social assistance for emigrants in poverty and the new nationality law (*España Exterior*, 30.10.2007). Shortly after the leader of the PP, Mariano Rajoy followed suit and visited the emigrant community in Buenos Aires and Montevideo. Mr. Rajoy met the mayor of Buenos Aires, a ‘great friend of the PP’ and various networks of Spanish business people in Argentina. He also attended a public meeting in Buenos Aires plaza where more than 1000 Spanish citizens turned out to greet him. In this meeting the PP president promised to increase the pensions, including those of Spaniards living abroad (*España Exterior*, 11.12.2007). Besides the leaders of the PSOE and the PP, several other party leaders visited Argentina. For instance, both party leaders and members of parliament from PP Galicia (PPdG), PSOE Galicia (PSdG) and PP Madrid visited the Spanish and Galician communities in Latin America and Europe several times up to the 2008 elections. In spite of the critical attitude of the BNG regarding the external vote, the party did send representatives to Argentina and Switzerland (*La Voz de Galicia* 14.02.2009; *España Exterior* 17.02.2009). The BNG senator who started the campaign in Argentina proposed the creation of a new and updated socio-economic census that would also include indicators regarding the social needs of the Galicians abroad.

By contrast the 2011 general election campaign lacked the same level of ‘big meetings’ with the parties’ presidents. In part this was because of the timing of the election. As PP Exterior explains, ‘the elections have been moved forward, the campaign was short. We had to divide our actions between the domestic and the external electorate with less time and resources’ (interview PP Exterior, 01.12.2011). Accordingly, it was mainly the coordinators of the exterior campaigns from the PP and the PSOE that travelled for the campaign events abroad rather than the party bigwigs. One exception in Europe was an important event organized in Paris where the former president Aznar (PP) and several UMP members participated. Also the Galician conservatives and socialists travelled abroad. This time, the message all politicians sent to the emigrants was related to the Spanish economic crisis and less to emigration related issues. The PP portrayed Rajoy as the saviour of the Spanish economy and asked the emigrants to take part in the big change. The PSOE had a ‘core message’ related to the social protection and the welfare state. As their coordinator of the PSOE exterior explained, ‘in 2008 we could deal with more emigration issues because the welfare state
was not in danger. Now it was questioned, so we had to make a campaign on our core socialist principles’ (interview, 05.06.2012).

One important development in terms of campaign strategies is that the parties increasingly establish contact with their voters through virtual platforms and digital media. Both the PSOE and PP have special webpages for the emigrated communities and increasingly use social media like Facebook and Twitter to communicate with the external voters\footnote{For example the page of PSOE En el mundo: \url{http://www.psoe.es/ambito/mundo/news/index.do}; PP Exterior: \url{http://www.pp.es/conocenos/pp-exterior_8.html}; last accessed 15.06.2012}. For instance, the coordinator of PSOE Exterior evaluates that the main difference between the 2008 and 2011 general election campaign is the extensive use of new technologies in 2011. In some cases this seems to replace the more expensive tradition of organizing campaign events with party bigwigs abroad. For instance, during the general election campaign in 2011, the PP Belgium prioritized an extensive e-campaign via Facebook and Twitter to intensify contact with their supporters but did not organize any official events with representatives of the party. However, we have no data to suggest that the use of the new technology is the main cause of a lower number of campaign events in 2011. The timing of the election is another important factor. Indeed representatives of the political parties emphasize how new technologies do not replace other types of campaign events, but remain a new and obvious tool for communication with voters. Importantly it is also seen as the ideal way of reaching out to new voters among the second generation Spanish emigrants or more recently emigrated Spanish citizens studying or working within the private sector.

Conclusions:
External voting rights opens up for a transnational electoral field spanning the country of origin and all the countries of residence of emigrant voters. This paper has taken a first cut into an analysis of the extent to which political parties meet the challenge of have sizeable parts of the electorate residing abroad. In the case of Spain, the last two general elections have seen a more intense electoral campaign abroad among the two main players: the PSOE and PP. Both of these political parties are explicitly targeting new groups of emigrants to expand their electoral support base. However, the attention and campaign strategies of political parties have been far from consistent over time and with some political parties dedicating more resources to transnational electoral strategies than others. There is also not always coherence between the extent to which a political party formulates a list of electoral promises to the emigrants in their electoral programme and the extent to which they dedicate actual resources to set up an internal and external infra-structure or organize local campaign events abroad.

In the opening sections of this paper we proposed analysing these fluctuating party dynamics along the logics of a vote seeking rationale (estimation of the sentiment
pool and closeness of the result) and a logic of path-dependency (a continuation of past practices despite a changing institutional environment).

In terms of the vote seeking rationale, the question is how the political parties balance their quest for more votes with the high cost of campaigning. The Spanish case shows that political parties, in particular after several elections, do have an idea of their sentiment pool based on the results of previous elections. They tend to follow the vote abroad. In terms of programmes, the renewed interest in the external electorate on the part of the PP, the PSOE and the IU in the latter half of the 1990s, coincides with the doubling of external voters after the electoral reform in 1995. It is especially from this point in time that there is an increase in convergence and ‘overbidding’ between the political programmes of the PSOE and the PP. The expansion of the programmes to address the needs of the ‘new migrants’ indicates an interest in reaching out to new voter groups. In terms of the opposing policy stances by the two regional parties in the debate on the electoral reform in 2010 coincides with the fact that the BNG is loosing out in regional elections because of the external vote while the CC stands to gain in especially regional elections through the vote from in particular Venezuela.

It is, however, mainly in terms of the creation of a transnational infrastructure for mobilization and the realization of campaign acts that there is a big difference among the parties. Clearly the formulation of a series of political commitments to emigrants is fairly low cost compared to dedicating resources to setting up external chapters and sending party representatives abroad. The extent of these dimensions of transnational mobilization does seem to ‘follow the vote’. The cost of campaigning is no barrier for more intensified transnational mobilization on the part of the major parties. However, for the smaller political parties who enjoy a relatively smaller electoral support it is less obvious to translate their carefully formulated electoral promises to the external voters into strategies for a stronger presence on the ground in the countries of residence. Here there is an important difference among the IU and the regional parties of BNG and CC. The regional parties bridge this dilemma by concentrated on 1 or 2 residence countries with high concentrations of voters from originating in these autonomous communities. Hence the BNG targets Argentina and the CC Venezuela. However, the IU being a national party with no regional base cannot concentrate its efforts this way and remains fairly weakly organized at the transnational level.

The gradually growing number and stable levels of turnout of external voters (until 2011) is, however, just one part of the story of the transnational mobilization of political parties. Why, for instance, does the PP only start intensifying and institutionalizing its transnational network of party offices and chasing up new voter groups almost 30 years after the implementation of external voting rights? The closeness of the result in particular in the regional elections forms an important part of the vote-seeking rationale. The PPs experience of ‘loosing the election because of the external vote’ in the Galician regional elections in 2005 has been an important motivation for intensifying transnational mobilization.
It is indeed difficult to analyse dynamics of transnational mobilization in general elections without including the regional election results. Political parties intensify their transnational campaign infrastructure and strategies in the general elections with an eye to the next regional elections where particularly contested seats in districts with a high proportion of emigrant voters are at play. Moreover, in particular the ‘Galician connection’ whereby Galician party leaders and MPs help the national parties campaign in the general elections further illustrate the interlinkage of the transnational mobilization between the general and regional elections. Indeed, the presence of Galician origin policy makers in national politics consolidates attention to the emigrant vote in LA/Argentina.

But there are also trends of path-dependency in the transnational mobilization of political parties. The IU, which pioneered identifying and defending the emigrant workers’ rights continues to maintain its list of electoral promises and its relatively low scale transnational infra-structure, despite an increasingly low return in terms of votes. More importantly, despite the important institutional change of the electoral law in 2010, and the prediction of a sharp decrease in voter registration and turnout by the parties themselves, the PSOE and PP continued to expand their networks and campaign activities in the 2011 general elections. The decrease in high profile party member trips abroad is explained with reference to the short notice of the campaign and the generally lower party budget for campaigning. The PP and PSOE are currently both proposing to revise, even change back, the issue of registered vote and during recent months the PP has begun further consolidating its support network through a new type of membership campaign among external voters. Again one interpretation could be that this with an eye to the next regional elections (in Andalucía and Asturias shortly after) but there also seems to be logic whereby once the content and organization of transnational mobilization is in place it is not easily dismantled.

The subject of external voting and transnational mobilization of political parties is marginal to the interpretation of electoral dynamics at the national level. Moreover, transnational mobilization take place in a much more complex institutional transnational environment where political parties largely operate in the dark compared to their level of information on voter-preferences at the national scene. Nevertheless, the Spanish case does indicate how political parties are capable of not just adapting to but also structuring the content and infra-structure of transnational democratic processes in the wake of the enfranchisement of external voters.

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