External Voting and Voter Turnout: A Discussion on Migrants' Decisions to Register and Vote in Home Country Elections

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Abstract

What factors influence migrants' decision to participate in home country elections? While existing literature on general voter turnout and turnout of minority and migrant voters has long attempted to explain why migrants become involved in the politics in their place of residence, little is known about what drives emigrants to vote in their home country elections from abroad. This paper builds up on this literature to determine what variables should be analyzed to understand the behavior of external voters, and also points out possible alternative variables. To support this discussion, the paper relies on analyses of four countries - Italy, Belgium, Mexico and Bolivia - that have implemented external voting mechanisms in recent years.

Introduction

An increasing number of countries have recently implemented external voting legislation that allows citizens residing abroad to vote in home country elections. Despite the existence of a growing literature on state policies trying to reach out to citizens residing abroad, little attention has been paid to the development of external voting. Very little is known of the motivations of states to extend voting to emigrants, or of the motivations of emigrants to take part in home country elections. What I will illustrate in this paper is that state motivations and emigrant voter turnout are strongly related. Indeed, I argue that the very process of adoption of external voting legislation strongly shapes the content of the

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legislation which, in turn, has a crucial impact on voter turnout. To support this point, I will first define the concept of external voting and discuss the difficulties related to measuring emigrant voter turnout. Second, I will review the existing literature on voter turnout in general, and on minority and migrant origin voter in particular. Third, building up on the literature that tries to explain why migrants get involved in politics in their place of residence, I will examine in detail the situation of four countries - Mexico, Bolivia, Italy and Belgium - that have implemented external voting mechanisms in recent years. Analyzing their legislation and the means by which it was implemented in recent elections will allow me to determine, in the fourth and final part of the paper, which variables should be looked at to understand the behavior of external voters, and possible alternative variables in the turnout of emigrant voters.

This paper relies on qualitative and quantitative data collected from fieldwork between September 2006 and March 2010. It relies on observations of electoral processes abroad through direct observation, analysis of legislative documents, election results, existing literature and press. For each country analyzed, interviews were conducted with government officials involved in electoral processes, elected officials, emigrant associations leaders and voters.

1. Defining external voting and apprehending voter turnout abroad

In the fast growing literature on diasporic policy, little attention has been paid to external voting. Existing literature largely approaches external voting mostly from a normative viewpoint (Barry, 2006, Bauböck, 2007, Blais *et al.*, 2001, López-Guerra, 2005, Nohlen and Grotz, 2000, Rubio-Marín, 2006). Over the last few years, several different comparative studies on external voting have attempted to make an inventory of the different systems and, in some cases, to shed light on the relevant motivations of the state on the specific issue of external voting (Collyer and Vathi, 2007, Gamlen, 2006, IDEA, 2007, Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003, Waterbury, 2008). The recent literature has contributed to clarify the

concept of external voting, to illustrate its different forms and to demonstrate that, contrary popular knowledge, it is a well established practice worldwide.

1.1 The definition of external voting and its development

A good introductory definition of external voting is that provided by the IDEA handbook (2007: 8) which defines it as, "procedures which enable some or all electors of a country who are temporarily or permanently abroad to exercise their voting rights from outside the national territory." External voting must therefore be differentiated from the franchise for foreigners in the host country and from the cases where emigrants are allowed to participate in elections in the home country, provided that they come back to the national territory to cast their vote on election day (even though this is also a mean for emigrants to have a direct say in homeland politics).

As Nohlen and Grotz (2000), Collyer and Vathi (2007), and the IDEA handbook (2007) have shown, different forms of external voting co-exist worldwide. These differences may concern, among other things, the conditions of access to the right to vote (e.g. belonging to specific professional groups or not residing abroad for more than a specific period), the type of elections the emigrant is invited to vote in and, most importantly, the voting mechanisms in place for exercising the right to vote from abroad. Bauböck (2007) distinguishes five ways to cast a ballot outside the country: voting in person at embassies and consulates, voting in person at polling stations abroad, mail ballots, proxy voting and remote electronic voting.

Despite these differences in levels of inclusion of the external electorate, and in the voting mechanisms, the above-mentioned comparative literature on external voting similarly notes a substantial increase in the number of states allowing for external voting (in some form) over the last decades (Wucker, 2004). Yet, Collyer and Vathi (2007) argue that the number of countries allowing external voting has been understated; including in recent

literature. Their study, on the contrary, demonstrates that out of the 144 countries surveyed, 115 allowed for some form of external voting, leading them to conclude that external voting is actually the norm at the international level. The IDEA handbook (2007), however, tempers this estimation by noting the numerous limitations of access to the external voting procedure in various cases. It further stresses that, even within the group of approximately 80 countries that do not have specific restrictions on the entitlement to an external vote, other legal, technical, operational or administrative barriers may de facto restrict the ability to vote from abroad. Nonetheless, the existence of liberal and restrictive external voting regimes does not hide the fact that the number of states allowing some form of external voting has boomed. This confirms the idea that we have developed in these first paragraphs that home states are trying to tighten the links with their citizens abroad by increasing their ability to be politically active both in the home and the host state without having to choose (Bauböck, 2003, Spiro, 2006).

1.2 Measuring emigrant voter turnout

Because of the limited comparative literature available, little is also know on the actual interest of emigrants in voting in home country elections. From the IDEA handbook, we do know that emigrant voters usually represent a small share of the total voting population and that "rates of registration and turnout among external voters are almost always lower than they are in-country" (2007: 31). Even though we will see that different levels of participation are observed worldwide, Leticia Calderon Chelius (2003) draws a similar conclusion from her comparative book on external voting in different parts of the worlds stating that low turnout among external voters is usually the norm at the international level. Before we turn to the reasons explaining the apparent weak interest of emigrant voters in home country elections, it is important to discuss what is meant by the actual concept of voter turnout in general but also applied to external voters in particular.

By definition, measuring voter turnout implies defining a ratio beforehand where the numerator and denominator are clearly defined. According to Geys (2006), there are three basic approaches to measuring voter turnout. The first requires dividing the number of voters by *voting age*. Second, voter turnout can be defined as the division of voters who are actually *eligible to vote* (i.e. in most countries this would comprise the population above 18 years old who are not deprived of their citizenship rights). A third approach consists in dividing the number of voters by the number of *registered voters* (comprising the population eligible to vote who actually requested to be added to voter registries). Even though Geys (2006)underscores that the choice of a specific method is often guided by the availability of data (a problem even more acute with emigrant voters), choosing one of these approaches instead of the other has clear implications in the assessment of voters' interest in participating in a specific election.

Bearing in mind the different definitions of voter turnout presented above, defining emigrant voter turnout is even more complex because of the limited quantitative data that is usually available on emigrants. As most sending countries do not oblige emigrants to make a formal declaration when they are leaving (or cannot enforce the rule), the estimation of the *total population of voting age* abroad often relies on the voluntary registration of emigrants with consular authorities. In cases when emigrants do not trust homeland authorities or when they do not see a clear interest in registering with consular authorities, emigrant population registries may prove far from comprehensive. Similarly, in Italy, the existence of competing registries on the Italian population abroad held by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs long created uncertainty with respect to the number of Italians residing abroad.

Determining the population abroad who is *eligible to vote* is equally problematic. Verifying that emigrants are not deprived from civic rights in their home country requires coordination between home country ministries. As we shall see below, Mexico has faced particular difficulties in estimating the potential number of emigrant voters that would

participate in the 2006 Presidential election. Not only is this task complex because a large portion of the Mexican population in the United States is undocumented, it was also impossible to determine the number of eligible voters because eligibility requires that the emigrant (like other Mexican citizens) to hold a voter identity card (*credencial de elector*) to be able to vote.

The only way to measure emigrant voter turnout with greater accuracy is to compare the emigrant voting population with the emigrant population that is actually *registered to vote from abroad*. This solution nonetheless creates two issues when trying to use voter turnout as an indicator for emigrants' interest in participating to home country elections. On the one hand, similarly to the situation of non-emigrant voters, in countries where voting is obligatory (even abroad) and migrants can be fined if they do not vote, registration and participation do not necessarily indicate migrants' interest in participating in home country elections. On the other hand, countries who have restrictive legislation on external voting (e.g. complex procedural requirements to register or vote) may have high voter turnout, which nonetheless reflects a very small portion of the total emigrant population of voting age. This is the case of Mexico, where although the entire emigrant population of voting age is estimated in the several millions, only 40,000 emigrants were actually registered to vote in the last Presidential election. Though 80 % of the registered population voted (technically reflecting high voter turnout), this number is marginal when compared to the total potential pool of emigrant voters For this reason, I argue in favor of comparing different indicators on emigrant voter turnout, even when data on the population of voting age and the population eligible to vote abroad are estimated. In this sense, measuring emigrant voter turnout is a trade-off between accuracy of the data and the pertinence of the conclusion that can be drawn from it.

1.3 Evaluating migrant interest and the success or failure of electoral processes abroad

As we will see in the case studies, external voting is often a controversial topic in the countries that allow it and turnout figurers can therefore play a crucial role in the survival of these electoral mechanisms (i.e. low turnout abroad often leading to criticism on the lack of interest of migrants for home country politics) but also, and most importantly, in the relations between emigrants and the home country. Indeed, when authorities adopt a very restrictive legislation on external voting, migrants could deduct from that that home country authorities are not concerned with their population abroad. Accordingly, the indicators that are used to measure success or failure are of critical political importance.

I identify three different ways of evaluating electoral processes abroad and assessing emigrant voter turnout as a sign of interest in participating to home country elections: one way consists in measuring emigrant voter turnout compared to resident voter turnout at the same election, while the other two measure emigrant voter turnout from an international perspective.

The first way by which measuring emigrant voter turnout abroad proves complex is in its comparison to non-emigrant voter turnout in the same election. Comparing these two figures appears, at the first sight, as a sensible way of measuring the impact of emigration on the citizens' interest in voting in home country elections. However, this viewpoint neglects the reality that external voting is regulated by ad-hoc pieces of legislation that often do not permit emigrants to register or vote in a similar way to non-emigrant voters. In Belgium for instance, voting is mandatory for residents and Belgians abroad, but voter registration is automatic for residents only (i.e. non-migrants receive their invitations to vote directly at home). Belgian emigrants, on the contrary, must request to be added to the voter registry at their consulate before each election. Comparing levels of participation of different kinds of electors at the same election can therefore prove unfitting when all electors do not access their right to vote under the same rules.

The second level way by which emigrant voter turnout can be evaluated is through international comparison. Two options are available here. On one hand, we can compare (when data is available) emigrant voter turnout of the same emigrant national group residing in different countries of settlement (e.g. comparing voter turnout of Italians in Germany with that of Italians in Argentina). Doing so may help us identify the influence of the countries of residence in the migrants' interest in participating in home country elections. In that sense, such comparison would address one of the concerns of Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) on the existing research on immigrant transnational practices by comparing the level of transnational involvement of migrants from the same national group in different receiving countries. On the other hand, international comparison can also mean comparing emigrant voter turnout between different countries that allow external voting (e.g. comparing voter turnout of Belgians abroad at Federal legislative elections with turnout of Bolivians abroad at Presidential elections). Here again, comparisons may be limited in two regards. First, comparing emigrant voter turnout at elections that do not concern the same level of power (e.g. presidential and legislative elections) neglects the fact that some elections may be more relevant than others to emigrant voters and non-emigrant voters alike. Second, as I already mentioned, the different legislation governing external voting in the countries that allow it have a strong impact on voter turnout. This is one the recurring point that I will make in the different case studies under scrutiny.

Now that we have discussed the use of voter turnout as a tool of measuring migrants' interest in participating to home country elections, we can turn to the existing literature explaining variations in general voter turnout and the turnout of migrant voters in the elections of their countries of settlement. Again, I discuss how relevant the existant literature is to explain emigrant voter turnout.

2. How can we explain the global trend towards low emigrant voter turnout? A view from existing literature

I mentioned earlier that the existing literature on external voting underlines the fact that low emigrant voter turnout is a general trend across countries allowing external voting, and also that emigrant voter turnout is generally lower than resident voter turnout. In this section of the paper, I will look at established variables explaining general voter turnout as defined by Geys (2006). Due to the lack of specific literature on emigrant voter turnout, I attempt to refine those variables with existing literature on voter turnout of emigrants in host country elections. Despite its lack of focus on home country politics, the literature has the advantage of underlining variables that are specific to the situation of migrants in relation with political participation. In addition, I refine those variables to the specific case of external voting. Altogether, the purpose of this combined effort is to come up with a list of indicators that will be used help find relevant variables on external voter turnout in the analysis of 4 case studies below.

Here again, we rely mostly on Geys's comparative work (2006), which reviewed a large number of studies on voter turnout and established a list of variables he classified under three categories, which underwent statistical analysis to determine whether or not they effectively explained voter turnout in existing studies on the topic.

2.1 Demographic and socio-economic variables

Under the socio-economic category, Geys lists different variables that concern the demographics of the voting population. The two variables that Geys identifies as relevant in the studies he covered are population size and population stability. The *population size* variable postulates that the smaller the size of the electoral district, the higher the incentive to vote due to a higher probability to influence electoral results with an individual vote. *Population stability*, on the other hand, shows a positive correlation between length of residence in an area and the likelihood to vote in elections happening in that area. In the literature on migrant voter turnout in host country elections, a similar argument has been

made by Messina (2006)who found that the duration of residence in the country positively influences immigrant voter turnout. A further relevant variable under the socio-economic category is *previous turnout,* which supports the idea that previous participation in elections increases the likelihood of participating in future elections. Two other variables that Geys found in the literature did not show positive correlation in the electoral studies he reviewed. This first is *population concentration,* which proposes that both social pressure to vote and the knowledge of candidates are lower in urban areas than in rural areas. *Population homogeneity* is the second variable that Geys did not find to be supported in existing studies. This term can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, socio-economic and racial or ethnic heterogeneity could be said of weakening cohesion and therefore undermining cohesion and social pressure to vote. On the other hand, heterogeneity could increase turnout when governments are performing redistributive roles by which the most politically powerful groups receive the largest benefits.

Looking at the literature on immigrant voter turnout in host country elections allows me to refine the above-mentioned socio-economic variables. As Bevelander and Pendakur (2009) show in their review of the literature, different approaches predominate in Europe and North America with respect to the relevance of socio-economic variables for immigrant voter turnout. In Europe, an important number of studies followed Fennema and Tillie's work (1999) on social capital. According to these two scholars, greater involvement of migrants in ethnic associations (used to measure levels of social capital), leads to greater trust in host country institutions. Higher levels of voter turnout is thus likely to be found within this migrant community. Applied to different migrant communities in different parts of Europe, this assertion has been consistently confirmed (Togeby, 2004, Berger *et al.*, 2004, Jacobs *et al.*, 2004). In North America, Bevelander and Pendakur (2009) postulate that research has focused on the relation between human capital and voting so far. Research thus focuses on demographic and socio-economic variables (age, education, occupation) as factors explaining lower turnout among minorities (Tuckel and Maisel, 1994, DeSipio, 1996). In their analysis of immigrant behavior in Canadian elections,

Bevelander and Pendakur nonetheless attempt to broaden the scope of analysis by concluding that, "it is not minority status driving [immigrant] voter turnout. Rather it is largely the combination of demographic, socioeconomic and social capital attributes that explains voter turnout" (2009: 1420).

2.2 Political variables

The second type of variables identified by Geys in the voter turnout literature are those of political nature - consisting of three different indicators. This first one is *closeness of the election,* which refers to the idea that when elections are expected to be narrow, the perceived utility of each individual vote is higher and, accordingly, turnout is also higher. Second, *campaign spending* is a political variable that Geys has found to strongly affect voter turnout in existing studies. Despite the potential distrust towards politics that negative campaigning could create, Geys (2006: 648) concludes that "[electoral] campaigns increase information and awareness levels within the electorate and decrease the costs of information acquisition." Third, *political fragmentation*, or the number of parties participating in the election, seems to yield different results according to existing studies. On the one hand, the existence of multiple political parties may increase voter awareness, as well as the likelihood that a voter will identify with a party's political platform. On the other hand, elections in which many parties take part often mean that coalitions will exist after the election. This, in turn, decreases voters' influence in the choice of the governing majority.

The literature on migrant voter turnout in host country elections point to another political variable that was mentioned in the discussion on social capital: trust in institutions. For Fennema and Tillie (1999), trust is believed derivative from involvement in migrant ethnic associations. Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001) also found that coming from a country that has a repressive political regime has a negative effect on migrant voter turnout in host

country elections. This element certainly deserves more attention in our discussion on external voter turnout variables.

2.3 Institutional variables

In addition to socio-economic and political variables, literature on voter turnout has pointed to a series of electoral procedures governing the elections that can strongly affect participation. I will devote significant attention to one procedure in my analysis: *registration requirements*. As underlined by Geys (2006), there is substantial evidence in literature that more complex registration procedures increase the information and monetary costs of voting. Indeed, compared to automatic registration, complex registration procedures require voters to acquire necessary information and to take the necessary time off other activities to register. A second institutional variable is the *electoral system* which appear to have significant influence as more proportional systems generally increase voter turnout (cf. discussion on political fragmentation). In the case external voting, attention must also be paid to the particularity of countries like Italy, in which emigrant voters elect specific lawmakers who directly represent them in Parliament. The third and most obvious institutional variable is compulsory voting which unsurprisingly always leads to higher voter turnout in countries that adopt it. With the case of Belgium, however, I will illustrate that the effect of compulsory voting abroad is not so easy to apprehend. The last institutional variable is the influence of *concurrent elections* on turnout, according to which the presence of other elections on the ballot increases media attention and voter awareness while decreasing the cost of voting.

3. Identifying relevant variables to analyze external voter turnout through case studies

How do the variables presented above apply to external voter turnout? In this section of the paper, I hypothesize that some variables are likely to be more relevant than others in

the case of external voting. I also underline the fact that these variables ought to be adapted for the analysis of external voter turnout. I subsequently proceed to the choice of case studies, which serve to test the relevance of the variables.

A serious issue in the choice of case studies is that demographic and socioeconomic variables very much blur the picture. Indeed, since most emigrant sending countries have an emigrant population that is spread in different countries (N.B. Mexico would be an exception in that sense), identifying a common demographic and socioeconomic profile for all external voters proceeding from the same country of origin is hardly possible. This is because the different countries of destination are most likely to attract different kinds of migrants, at different periods, and with different socioeconomic profiles. Further, different contexts of migration and settlement have an effect on voter turnout. This does not mean that I exclude these variables from my analysis. On the contrary, significant attention will be devoted to stress differences in the turnout of migrants of the same national origin who have settled in different countries.

For the selection of the case studies, I have however decided to focus on the two other variables that are the institutional and political variables. I hypothesize that the institutional variable – primarily *registration rules* - most affect emigrant voters because, as I argue elsewhere (Lafleur, forthcoming), controlling the extension of the electoral body abroad is the prime concern of political parties negotiating the adoption of external voting laws. The *electoral system abroad* is a second variable that I consider to be capable of influencing voter turnout. Indeed, external voting legislation often does not provide for the right to vote in similar kind of elections from one country to the next. Even though some countries have provisions for external voting at the referenda, regional elections (e.g. Mexico's state of Michoacán), and supranational elections (e.g. European Parliament elections or the election of Colombian representatives at the Andean Parliament), presidential and legislative elections are the most common elections which emigrants are able to vote. The different types of elections and different ways in which external votes are

counted (e.g. extra-territorial with direct representation of emigrants in Parliament for Italians abroad) are criteria worth taking in consideration. As most countries only allow emigrants to vote in one type of election, the role of concurrent elections was not considered in the choice of case studies.

With regard to political variables, I have largely focused on the *role of political parties*. In choosing case studies, I have approached the capacity of parties to convince citizens abroad to vote in two ways: their presence in countries of residence, and their involvement abroad during the electoral campaign. In addition to the role of political parties, election closeness is considered an important variable in voter participation. The closer the election, the more concerned the emigrant is likely to be. I assume this phenomenon applies comparably to resident voters as external voters.

	Institutional Variables	**Political Variables**
Italy **+ +**	Easy registration procedure	Strong campaigning abroad
	Direct representation of emigrants in Parliament (extra-territorial constituency)	Strong presence of political parties abroad
	Right to vote at legislative elections and some referendums but not on the same day	Close elections (2006)
Belgium **+ -**	Easy registration procedure	Weak presence of political parties abroad
	Vote at legislative elections in the Belgian electoral district of their choice	Weak campaigning abroad
	No concurrent elections possible	No close elections
Mexico **- +**	Restrictive registration procedure	Strong presence of political parties abroad (USA)
	Vote at Presidential elections	Campaigning abroad is prohibited by Law
	No concurrent elections possible	Close election
Bolivia **- -**	Restrictive registration procedure	Presence of political parties abroad is new and variable according to countries of destination
	Vote at presidential elections only	Weak campaigning
	No concurrent elections possible	No close election

3.1 Italy

Despite the fact that the issue of external voting had been on the Italian Parliament's agenda for the greater part of the 20th Century and that Italians abroad had long been allowed to come to back to vote in Italy on Election Day, external voting only became a reality after a reform to the constitution in 1999 and the adoption of a law of application, Law No. 459, on December 27, 2001.

With this law, all Italian citizens residing abroad (and complying with the legal requirements applying to all citizens) have the to right to participate in the vote by mail to the elections of both Chambers and referenda. Also, the vote of Italians abroad is automatic: voters receive at home an electoral package containing the ballot (without having to request it beforehand).

Another important element of the law is the creation of four geographical sectors (repartizioni) within the foreign constituency: Europe, South America, Northern and Central America, and Africa, Asia, Oceania and Antarctica. In these sectors, candidates -who must themselves be Italians abroad- compete for 12 seats of senators and 6 of MPs.

The first exercises of the right to vote from abroad have not been for legislative elections but rather for referenda the 15th June 2003 (on labor and land settlement issues) and 12 and 13th June 2005 (on the possibility to lift the limitations to the research on human embryos)[3]. 2,206,875 electoral packages were sent in 2003 of which 10% were actually never delivered. Despite the fact that these questions do not relate very much to the emigrants' interests, the participation rate was roughly similar to that observed on the national territory (25,7% in Italy and 21.8% abroad). In 2005, with a referendum asking more sensitive ethical questions, 19% of voters abroad used their right while 25.9% of

[3] Both referenda were declared invalid for lack of participation.

Italian residents Italy did so (with differences between South America and Europe confirmed). In both cases, the overall results went in the same direction at home and abroad.

Shortly after the second referendum, the institutional preparation for the first experience of external voting at legislative elections started in Italy by launching an information campaign abroad and, most importantly, a massive mailing campaign asking unregistered Italians abroad to confirm, correct and complement the information already in possession of the authorities.

In addition to the institutional preparation discussed above, political parties also designed their own campaigns to attract electors abroad. By organizing primaries in 20 countries abroad and looking for the support of sister parties in Italian emigrants' countries of residence, the *Unione* list led by Romano Prodi paid more attention to external voters than the *Casa delle Libertà* led by Silvio Berlusconi. The centre-right coalition *Casa delle Libertà*, on the other hand, did not to come up with unique lists abroad as it did at home[4]. Also, it thought that the new proportional system with thresholds and a majority premium for the winner would ensure its victory in Italy. Finally, it gave almost no support to its candidates abroad.

One of the major achievements of this first attempt at external voting for parliamentary elections is its relatively high participation rate of 38.93% (N actual voters/N registered voters) compared with other countries allowing this form of suffrage. Even though emigrants and citizens residing in Italy were equally uninterested in participating in the last two referenda, Italian residents unsurprisingly mobilized much more for the legislative elections (81.4%). Also, all communities were not equally participative. Italian residents in South America -especially the Argentines- mobilized more than other voters, particularly

[4] Alleanza Nazionale's intimate conviction was that Italians abroad would favor them over any other right-wing movement.

the European residents (with the notable exception of Switzerland). Europe however remained by far the largest electoral sector in absolute terms.

Table 1. Participation to the 2006 elections abroad (House of representatives)

Repartition	*Ballot sent to voters abroad*	*Ballot sent back by voter to consular authorities*	*Turnout (Ballot sent back by voters in %)*
Asia, Africa, Oceania & Antartica	152,068	60,599	39.85
Northern and central America	282,249	97,943	34.70
South America	693,522	326,003	47.01
Europe	1,579,543	569,319	36.04
TOTAL	2,707,382	1,053,864	38.93

Sources: (Ministero dell'Interno, 2006)

Table 2. Most participative countries of residence (House of representatives)

Country	*Ballot sent back by voter to consular authorities*	*Ballot sent back by voter (%)*	*Country*	*Ballot sent back by voter to consular authorities*	*Ballot sent back by voter (%)*
Argentina	180,900	50.59	Venezuela	28,589	46.26
Switzerland	179,846	48.16	Uruguay	28,271	60.86
Germany	143,526	33.29	Spain	12,234	25.05
France	84,535	30.33	Peru	7,681	46.81
Brazil	67,834	40.67	Netherlands	7,633	34.61
Belgium	56,198	30.20	Luxemburg	6,669	39.67
USA	51,091	30.71	South Africa	6,622	31.20
UK	41,231	30.58	Chile	5,799	21.53
Canada	40,306	40.46	Austria	4,346	43.52
Australia	34,808	36.82	Croatia	4,031	59.59

Sources: Ministero dell'Interno (2006)

In analyzing the results of the elections, it can be argued that the Unione's strategy has paid off. Indeed, after the election, the Unione occupies 6 of the 12 reserved seats in the House (plus one seat to the candidate of Italia dei Valori, a party that supports the centre-left majority) and 4 of the 6 seats in the Senate. Forza Italia, on the contrary, only managed to get three MPs and one senator, while Alleanza Nazionale (Tremaglia list) has only one MP. Except for the European sector where the centre-left coalition's victory is blatant, its superior performances to those of the centre-right in other geographical sectors appear largely due to the division of centre-right lists abroad (as the 2008 elections would later confirm).

In Argentina, the independent list of the charismatic millionaire Pallaro (originally close to Forza Italia) further split the forces of the centre-right. More interesting is the fact that Senator Pallaro eventually decided to support Prodi's coalition and gave him the necessary Senate seat to back up his parliamentary majority. In that sense, the foreign constituency – that was created to prevent external voters from deciding the election- failed to reach its goal. This peculiar situation led to bitter criticism among right-wing leaders who repeatedly questioned the validity of elections abroad (The Advertiser, 2006, Fondazione Migrantes, 2006). As the 2008 elections would confirm, Italy's liberal law on external voting would also imply far more accusations of fraud abroad than more restrictive legislation of other countries.

Table 3. Elections Results

Sector Africa, Asia, Oceania and Antarctica

House				Senate		
List	N votes	% of votes	seats	N votes	% of votes	seats
Unione	26,164	47.52	1	23,067	45.47	1
Forza Italia	21,506	39.06	0	18,383	36.24	0

Per Italia nel mondo- Tremaglia	5,730	10.41	0	4,845	9.55	0

Sector Northern and Central America

House				Senate		
List	N votes	% of votes	seats	N votes	% of votes	seats
Unione	33,881	38.72	1	32,036	38.03	1
Forza Italia	26,843	30.68	1	25,556	30.33	0
Per Italia nel mondo- Tremaglia	10,897	12.45	0	11,604	13.77	0
Udc	9,494	10.85	0	9,412	11.17	0

Sector South America

House				Senate		
List	N votes	% of votes	seats	N votes	% of votes	seats
Ass. Italiane in Sud America	99,817	33.12	1	85,745	31.51	1
Unione	83,373	27.66	1	81,899	30.10	1
Per Italia nel mondo- Tremaglia	35,207	11.68	1	30,134	11.07	0
Udc	32,726	10.86	0	25,593	9.41	0
Forza Italia	25,431	8.44	0	24,141	8.87	0

Sector Europe

House				Senate		
List	N votes	% of votes	seats	N votes	% of votes	seats
Unione	277,996	52.73	3	256,355	52.97	1
Forza Italia	128,756	24.42	2	118,306	24.44	1
Di Pietro Italia dei Valori	27,432	5.20	1	26,486	5.47	0
Udc	24,236	4.60	0	22,273	4.60	0
Per Italia nel mondo- Tremaglia	20,271	3.85	0	18,472	3.82	0
Lega Nord	12,319	2.34	0	12,006	2.48	0

Source: Ministero del Interno (2006)

3.2 Mexico

Despite the sporadic apparition of the topic of external voting in Mexican politics in the 1920s, 1940s and 1970s (Santamaría Gómez, 2001), Mexicans abroad did not vigorously campaign for external voting rights because the Mexican regime in place rendered elections "mere rituals" (Martínez Saldaña, 1998: 156). With increasing pressure on the leading *Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)* to liberalize the regime in the 1990s, furthered by the creation of the left-wing *Partido Revolucionario Democratico (PRD), which was* strongly connected with Mexicans abroad, the party-state began to develop policies towards the emigrants it had long neglected. Despite the reluctance of the PRI to extend voting rights to migrants, as leaders were convinced that emigrant voters would strongly boycott elections, a first step to extend voting rights was taken in the 2000 Presidential elections, when a limited number of emigrants were allowed to travel back to Mexican border cities and cast their votes there. With the coming to power of the liberal party's (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox in 2000, the promise was rapidly made that external voting would be a reality by the next election. Despite the continuing pressure of emigrant associations that lobbied Congress to pass a law, political parties only reached an agreement on very restrictive external voting legislation for Presidential elections one year before the 2006 election. Anxieties on the impact of massive participation abroad on electoral results coupled with the fear of being blamed for preventing migrants from voting pushed political parties to adopt external voting measures that would prove very difficult to implement. The law of June 28, 2005 reflects this compromise in four instances. First, the extra-territorial constituency long demanded by the PRD would not be created at this stage and the voting right was thus limited to presidential elections. Second, only the emigrants who had a voter identity card (credencial de elector) would be able to vote, and the IFE would not make those cards accessible abroad. Third, campaigning and raising funds abroad was forbidden for Mexican political parties. Fourth, registered voters would only be able to cast their vote by registered mail.

During preparation for external voting in 2006, several experts warned that the rate of participation abroad was likely to be limited. An expert commission of the IFE set up in

1998 to study external voting in Mexico estimated that around 11 million Mexicans residing abroad would potentially qualify as voting citizens for the 2000 election. The commission also estimated that only 1.5 million of these emigrants had a valid voter identity card. Later, in a technical opinion addressed to Parliament in 2005, the IFE estimated that 4 million Mexicans in the United States held a voter identity card but warned that different factors would reduce the actual participation (IFE, 2005). Marcelli and Cornelius (2005) attempted to develop more realistic estimations based on a survey of the Mexican migrants in Los Angeles who participated in the 2000 elections (in the special voting stations or in their electoral district before migrating). They evaluated the different levels of voters' educational attainment, and the distance between the emigrant and the border, and came up with a potential participation of 125,000 to 360,000 emigrants. For some migrants themselves, particularly the Coalition for the Political Rights of Mexicans Abroad (CDPME), a Mexican lobby group connected with emigrant associations in the United States, it was also clear that not all of the 4 millions emigrants supposed to hold a voter identity card would register to vote. It nonetheless expected that the associations' and the IFE's joint effort in promoting registration would result in over 10 percent of them actually participating (Ross Pineda, 2005).

In fact, all of these estimations far exceeded the real registration level. In contrast to Italy, Mexico did not adopt the principle of automatic vote abroad. Those emigrants who have a voter ID card must thus fill out a registration form (either downloaded from the Internet or received at the distribution points set up by the IFE and the associations) and return it by registered mail to the IFE who would subsequently send them the electoral package by the Post.

The IFE received 57,677 emigrants' application forms, and 40,876 of these requests actually fit the criteria for being added to voters' residing abroad electoral list. Eventually, 79.8 percent of these eligible voters (32,632) cast their votes in the 2006 presidential election if we consider turnout as the number of voters divided by the number of emigrants

who registered. On the contrary, despite the absence of data on the Mexican population of voting age and on the Mexican population eligible to vote (i.e. holding a voter ID card), turnout is likely to have been lower than 1% if we refer these other ratios that are also used to measure voter turnout. These figures can hardly be compared to the overall participation figures (emigrant + resident voters) that show a 58.55% turnout among the 71,374,373 registered voters in the 2006 Presidential Election. An additional element that is striking is that while Mexicans in the United States represent 98% of the Mexican emigrant population, they only accounted for 87% of the vote cast at the 2006 presidential election.

These figures naturally spurred strong controversy between emigrants and Mexican authorities. The IFE in particular has been accused of not aggressively trying to register people abroad. Voices were also heard in Mexico among proponents of external voting that the associations abroad had waited for the IFE to do the work and had not encouraged their members to register. Despite their history of campaigning among Mexicans in the US in hope that emigrants would influences their relatives' vote, the new law that allowed for the direct political participation of migrants in elections now prevented political parties from campaigning abroad. This, in all likelihood, further undermined efforts to raise emigrants' awareness of the coming election.

Table 1. Registration by country of residence compared to Mexican population

Country of residence	*Number of registered voters*	*Estimated total Mexican population (incl. -18 y.o.)*
USA	35,763	11,5 million
Spain	1,238	21,107
Canada	863	49,925
France	510	1,392
UK	447	5,297

Germany	393	9,225
Italy	212	6,798
Switzerland	188	751
Netherlands	100	3,000
Belgium	83	1,338
Other	1079	

Sources: (COVE, 2006) (IME unpublished statistics, 2010).

Looking at the regional state of origin of those registered emigrants, Table 2 shows that a majority comes from the Federal district and that more than half of them actually come from just 5 of the 32 Mexican states. It may appear surprising that traditional migrant-sending states like Zacatecas have not performed better in terms of registration especially when they are known for the dynamism of transnational associations and for the authorities' support of transnational political participation at the local level (Moctezuma Longoria, 2003).

Table 2. Mexican state of origin of the emigrants who submitted a registration form

Region of Origin	*Number of requests*
Federal District	6,281
Jalisco	5,047
State of Mexico	4,149
Michoacan	3,368
Guanajuato	2,793
Nuevo Leon	1,799
Puebla	1,631
Baja California Norte	1,582
Chihuahua	1,235

Veracruz	1,191
Other	11,800

Source: COVE 2006

The elections results abroad appear quite different from the overall election results as shown in table 3. Naturally, the representative character of the 33,131 voters who participated is questionable due to the likely selection bias introduced by the law (Smith, 2008). Nonetheless, the limited experiment confirmed the trend that Mexican scholars had observed during the 2000 elections when special polling stations where set up in Mexican border towns (Espinoza Valle, 2004) (2): strong performances of the PRD and especially the liberal party PAN, while the former state-party, the PRI, performed far worse with emigrants than with citizens on the national territory. As opposed to these observations, the survey conducted among more than 1000 Mexicans in Dallas, San Diego and Indiana by McCann, Cornelius and Leal (2006) confirms the selection bias in the emigrant voting population. Indeed, their sample, which included voters and non voters, showed similar political preferences to those shown by the whole Mexican population at the 2006 election therefore supporting the idea that the 33,000 emigrant voters might not be representative of the whole emigrant population. Considering the importance for political parties of the potential support or opposition they can find abroad in shaping their position on external voting, this information seems particularly important.

A last element worth mentioning is that the very disputed 2006 Presidential Election was decided by around 250,000 votes (which created a major post-electoral controversy in the country). Since the total number of voters who casted their ballots from abroad did not come anyway near that number, no suspicion was raised on the legitimacy of the external voting process or the vote itself. However, the limited first experience of external voting from abroad may have contributed to the survival of the right.

Table 3. Results abroad and overall (residents + emigrants)

Candidate	*% among emigrants*	*Overall results*
Felipe Caderón (PAN)	58,29	35,89
Andrés Manuel López Obrador (PRD)	34,00	35,31
Roberto Madrazo (PRI)	4,17	22,26
Patricia Mercado (Alternativa)	2,72	2,70
Roberto Campa (NA)	0,39	0,96
Write-in candidates	0,09	0,71
Double votes / null votes	0,34	2,16

Source: COVE 2006

3.3 Belgium

The case of Belgium illustrates important differences with the other countries detailed in this article. Despite a long history of migration, Belgium has not experience large emigration flows since the end of World War II (with the exception of Belgians to the former Congolese colony). Also, the existence of only two large emigrant associations underlines the weak sense of community for Belgians abroad. For that reason, while legislative proposals had been on the agenda for decades, external voting has certainly not been a priority for most political parties except for the liberals who considered emigrants as potential right-wing voters. The adoption of such legislation in 1998 is therefore more the result of political bargaining by the liberals than the conclusion of a struggle led by migrants themselves. Indeed, the Belgian government was forced to reform its constitution to comply with EU rules that EU citizens residing in Belgium to participate to local elections there. The government at the time did not have the majority to reform the constitution , and a deal was struck with the liberals (in the opposition then) to pass legislation on external voting at Federal legislative elections in exchange for their support of constitutional reform. The external voting law on December 18, 1998 was the result of this political compromise. Its content, as much as the legislative debates that preceded the adoption of the law, underscored the reserves that many parties had against external

voting. It is therefore not surprising that the legislation was passed was very restrictive. Looking at this law and its effects and subsequent reforms nonetheless illustrates the impact of administrative barriers.

The 1998 law provided that, similarly to other countries, only those citizens whose names are in the consular registry may register as external voters. In contrast to resident voters in Belgium, voting from abroad was not automatic, nor an obligation. Second, the voter-to-be had to demonstrate that he met certain registration criteria: legal voting age, proof of legal residence abroad, not being sentenced for crimes that would cause the loss of the right to vote in Belgium, as well as certify that he did not have the right to vote in elections of his country of residence (justified by the "one man – one vote principle"). Third, the candidate was required to declare a voting proxy, who was an eligible voter residing in Belgium and a relative up to the third degree. This criteria forced emigrants to find relatives back home in Belgium to vote in their name on Election Day, rather than allow them to vote directly by mail ballot or in consulates. Further complicating the voting process, the proxy was required to show the electoral officer different documents on Election Day, including a form delivered by the emigrant's embassy or the consulate no earlier than fifteen days before the election, stating that the emigrant voter was still alive! The Belgian government's strict requirements obviously produced low rates of participation by external voters. In illustration of this, only 18 electors only cast their vote from abroad at the 1999 Federal legislative elections.

This situation outraged the liberals, who considered their part of the deal unfulfilled. As they entered the government majority in 1999, they quickly created modifications to the law. The first step actually consisted in passing a law on June 26, 2002 which created a single consular registry. While emigrants would be free to request to be added to the registry, their registration would create the obligation to vote in legislative elections just like for Belgian residents. However, unlike for Belgian residents or Italian external voters,

registration would still not be automatic, and emigrants would have to reply before each election to an invitation to register.

The law of March 7, 2002 substantially changed the voting procedures for Belgians abroad. Emigrant voters were now offered several modalities to cast their ballot: in person by returning to Belgium on Election Day, by proxy in Belgium, by proxy at an embassy/consulate, or by mail. Emigrants now could also choose the municipality (and therefore the electoral district) in which their votes would be counted. Until today, in an ethnically divided country like Belgium, this situation has raised concern among some politicians that emigrants chose to vote in electoral districts with which they have no legitimate connection, but where they feel they can have a greater impact.

The creation of the consular registry allowed for the registration of 215,701 Belgians of eligible voting age residing abroad. However, because of the large concentration of Belgians abroad in Europe (66.29% of them live in EU-15 countries), it is likely that many emigrants do not see a real benefit of registering with the Belgian embassies and consulates and would therefore not appear in the consular register. Table 1 below lists emigrant voters' places of residence, which unsurprisingly indicates that the countries hosting the largest number of Belgian citizens also host the largest number of voters.

Of the more than 200,000 eligible voters, 114,677 sent the voter registration form back to the administration before the deadline ((SPF Intérieur, 2007). In other words, about half of the potential emigrant electorate complied with the requirement to ask to be added to the voter list. Looking now at the turnout figures defined as the number of external voters on the number of registered voters abroad, the limited data available shows that 87.64% of those who had chosen to vote in person or by proxy at embassies/consulates showed up, while 65.95% of those who chose to vote by mail did. By comparison, 91.9% of the Belgian population eligible to vote actually participated to the 2003 elections.

Looking at the regional distribution of voters, 37.2% of the registered voters chose to register with a municipality belonging to a Flemish province, 37.8% chose to register with a municipality belonging to a Walloon province, and 25% registered in the Brussels district. These figures confirm that since French-speaking Belgians are over-represented in the emigrant population, there is likely no regional bias in the emigrant voting population.

Table 1. Countries of residence of registered voters

	Country of residence	*Number of registered Belgian voters in 2003*
1	France	29,506
2	Netherlands	10,735
3	Germany	10,336
4	Spain	7,711
5	Luxemburg	7,631
6	United States	6,520
7	Switzerland	6,132
8	Great-Britain	4,258
9	Canada	3,704
10	Italy	3,088
11	South Africa	2,653
12	Argentina	2,596

Concerning the chosen voting modalities, 18.7% registered to vote either in person (5%) or by proxy in Belgium (13.7%), 14% chose to vote either in person (13.2%) or by proxy (0.8%) in an embassy/consulate, and an overwhelming majority (67.6%) decided to vote by mail. The mail option was certainly the easiest and cheapest way to cast a vote from abroad, considering the distance that sometimes separates the emigrant from an embassy. A quick calculation allows us to measure the impact of the emigrant vote.

Before I examine the results, it must be mentioned that most of the political parties did nothing to encourage Belgians abroad to register to vote, and very little to attract emigrant votes. The most active party is the French-speaking liberal party MR, which sent a letter with its platform to Belgians abroad. Also, the liberal Minister of Foreign Affairs took advantage of his presence abroad to meet with the Belgian emigrant community. Other

parties merel set up sections dedicated to Belgians abroad on their websites, or advertised their platforms in the newsletter of the French-speaking emigrant association.

Looking at the election results, it must be clarified that only the ballots of those expatriates who voted in person or by proxy in an embassy or in a consulate are counted by the special counting station set up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which subsequently sends the results to the head counting station of each electoral college). In contrast, emigrants who chose any of the three other modalities had their votes mixed with those of the general voting population before the count. Accordingly, we only know the results of a fraction (14%) of the Belgian emigrant community who has voted. These results are nonetheless striking when compared to the overall results of the 2003 elections. As the elections for the Chamber and the Senate are held on the same day, the results between the two elections is quite similar. For this reason, we will only compare the results of the emigrant vote and of the overall Belgian population in the Senate in the two main regions (Flanders and Wallonia, excluding Brussels).

Table 4. 2003 elections results – Senate (Flanders)

Flemish constituency	*Overall results (%)*	*Result of emigrant vote in embassies /consulates (%)*
Sp.a-spirit	25.44	12.21
VLD	24.36	31.01
CD&V	20.54	20.18
Vlaams Blok	17.93	16.23
N-VA	4.85	4.39
AGALEV	3.94	8.78

Table 5. 2003 elections results – Senate (Wallonia)

Walloon constituency	*Overall results (%)*	*Result of emigrant vote in embassies /consulates (%)*
PS	35.60	20.35
MR	30.29	39.69
CDH	15.51	11.04

ECOLO	7.69	17.40
FN	6.04	2.79

As expected by these parties themselves, the biggest beneficiaries of external voting in both regions are the liberals (MR and VLD) who are both the preferred parties of the emigrant community. The second largest beneficiaries are the ecologist parties (ECOLO and AGALEV) who both do twice as well in the emigrant community as in the overall population. On the contrary, the two Socialists parties (Walloon PS and Flemish Sp.a) clearly find much less support in the emigrant community than in the overall population. Perhaps the most intersting result of this comparative analysis is the performance of the Flemish nationalist and extreme-right party Vlaams Blok which seems contradictory with the usual clichés attached to Belgian emigrants (where crossing borders reinforces the feeling of attachment to unitary Belgium). However, as the Vlaams Blok has progressively gained a status of legitimate political actor in the Flemish political arena, it is less surprising that, just like voters residing in Belgium, emigrant voters may be attracted to this party.

3.4 Bolivia

The issue of external voting in Bolivia presents several similarities to Mexico. Indeed, Bolivian authorities have long neglected migration issues and expressed more concern for regulating inflows towards Bolivia than designing policies towards its population abroad. The adoption of electoral reform in 1991, without implementing the necessary legislation to make it a reality, confirms the idea that there was little interest on the part of governmental authorities. This situation changed in the 2000s, however, as social confrontations on natural resources led to the eventual resignation of President Mesa and the election of President Evo Morales and his *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) party. This process saw Bolivian migrants residing in Argentina strongly becoming involved in home country politics, by organizing marches in Buenos Aires and supporting protesting movements in Bolivia from abroad. In this context of the growing politicization of emigrants, the demand for external voting rights became more and more acute. In 2005, a

Bolivian Court ruled in favor of the emigrants, stating that the recognition the 1991 electoral reforms should be properly implemented.

With the coming to power of Morales in 2006, Bolivian discourse and policies on migration changed radically (Domenech and Hinojosa Gordonava, 2009). At the discursive level, similarly to Mexico under Fox, Bolivians abroad moved from being the "forgotten citizens" to central actors in the process of the change that MAS wished to implement in that country. Similarly, Morales engaged in controversy with the European Union, by openly criticizing an EU directive on the return of undocumented immigrants. On the policy level, Morales's government integrated the issue of emigration in its National Development Plan and reformed the functions of the consular services. Most importantly, however, in a way that was consistent with his discourse on the involvement of emigrants in the political community and in response to the continuing pressures pressure of emigrants, Morales promised to make external voting a reality.

On May 21, 2008, Congress adopted a proposal of a law on external voting, and sent it to the Senate where it was subsequently blocked by the right-wing opposition (PODEMOS). The latter strongly feared the impact of the extension of the electorate, as emigrants in Argentina (where most Bolivians abroad concentrate) proved to be very supportive of Evo Morales (an impression confirmed by the symbolic vote abroad organized by pro-Morales associations in Argentina for the 2008 Referendum). Despite the official recognition of the right to vote from abroad in the new constitution adopted by referendum in 2009, no solution was in sight in the Senate. At that stage, knowing that pressure would eventually lead the opposition to comprise, Evo Morales began a hunger strike to force the adoption of the new transitory electoral law, of which external voting was among the most sensitive issues. Rapidly, emigrant associations throughout Europe and Latin America followed the strike in front of embassies and consulates. This strategy eventually led to the adoption of Law 4021 on April 14, 2009, which allowed legislative and presidential elections to be held that same year, after the creation of new biometric voter registry and the inclusion of

external voting provisions by mail ballot for presidential elections, though under very strict conditions.

Three elements of this law must be underlined. First, only the Bolivians residing in the four of the largest receiving countries -Argentina, Brazil, Spain and the USA- would be allowed to register as external voters. Second, the law states that emigrant voters cannot represent more than 6% of the total voter registry (a figure determined on the basis of the last election's registry). In addition, in order to limit the influence of Bolivians in Argentina, no single country of residence can concentrate more than half of the total emigrant voting population abroad. The decision was taken to grant each of the four countries a target registration figure according to the relative size of the Bolivian community in these countries. Third, the National Electoral Court of Bolivia (CNE) is in charge of the process of registration abroad, and has 30 days to register a maximum of 211,093 emigrant voters in the four host countries. In contrast to Belgium and Italy, at no point were the consular authorities involved in the registration process. Also, the CNE could not count the Bolivia's consulat register to get in touch with voters (the register of external voters thus started from a blank sheet). Also, it is worth mentioning that Bolivia beneficiated from the expertise of Mexico's IFE in the registration of voters abroad (despite the controversy on the IFE's management of the registration of Mexicans abroad).

With very restrictive legislation, the impossibility to use the consular network to register voters, and the limited resources granted to Bolivia's National Electoral Court to register voters in four countries under a time limit of only 30 days, it is not surprising that the legal limit to voter registration abroad has not yet been reached. Indeed, only, 169,096 voters residing abroad were added to the biometric voting register. Compared to the estimated Bolivian population abroad, of around 2 million this figure seems somehow limited. However, in comparison to Mexico, which has comparably restrictive registration procedures, the Bolivian performance appears more positive.

Country of residence	*Estimated Bolivian population (incl. -18. y.o.)*	*Maximum number of voters to be registered*	*Actual number of registered voters*	*Turnout (N voters/N registered voters)*
Argentina	1.08 million	105,546	89,953	73.9%
Spain	386,000	38,380	49,995	71,4%
USA	366,000	44,137	11,006	77,08%
Brazil	296,000	23,028	18,142	78,7%

Source: IBCE 2008, CNE 2009.

As revealed during fieldwork in the United States, the difference with Bolivia's CNE seems to be that, in contrast to Mexico's IFE, it did not simply hand out registration forms, but went directly into on the field to meet with potential voters and help them, one by one, to register. Like in Mexico, turnout among Bolivians abroad (defined by N voters abroad / N registered voters) tends to be very high. However, the influence of the obligatory vote in Bolivian elections (a rule that has not applied to external voters) should not be underestimated as a factor that influences voter turnout (above 70% abroad). Voter turnout among Bolivian residents was 95,25%.

An equally interesting piece of information revealed by the Spanish press was that some Bolivian voters-to-be in Sevilla had beneficiated from the support local authorities to go to Madrid and register as voters from abroad (ABC, 15/10/2009). The fact that Spain will host local elections next year, in which Bolivians will be invited to participate for the first time, may have impacted this decision. The case of Spain is also interesting because it is the only country where the original registration limits set by authorities have been exceeded. Indeed, as the registration deadline was coming closer, the decision was taken to allow more voters to register there, as other countries would not reach their limit.

The Spanish exception is also visible in election results. While results are very clear in all other three countries, Bolivians in Spain are split between the two big political forces of Bolivia. This situation encourages analysis on the timing of Bolivian migration to Spain (more recent) and its socio-economic profile to explain both turnout and results there. Strong differences in electoral results between the United States and the two Latin American countries further highlight the importance of these factors. Finally, electoral results in Argentina and Brazil confirm the right-wing fear that Bolivian migrants there would massively support Morales, and certainly encouraging them to argue in favor of maintaining restrictive registration procedures abroad in the future.

Table 2. Results of the 2009 Presidential Elections

	MAS (Morales)	*Convergencia (Reyes)*
Argentina	92,.13	3,.19
Brazil	94,.95	2,.73
USA	31,.03	61,.04
Spain	48,.21	43,.04
Total vote abroad	75,.77	18,.44
Domestic results	63,.91	26,.68

Source: CNE 2009

4. Defining variables to analyze emigrant voter turnout

The empirical analysis presented above has provided rich material in terms of determining the possible variables explaining emigrant voter turnout in home country elections. To conclude this paper, I will refer back to the three variables identified by Geys (2006), but will modify them based on my empirical analysis. Under these three renewed categories, I therefore list the variables that –even though I was not able to isolate the exact influences on voter turnout- I have found deserving of specific attention in the analysis on the implementation external voting.

4.1 Institutional variables

Contrarily to Geys, I wish to begin this discussion with the influence of institutional variables that I have found to occupy significant space in political parties and migrants' discussion on external voter turnout. *Registration requirements* are among the most crucial elements in voter turnout. We must be mindful that registration requirements influence the capacity of eligible external voters to register, and thus must not influence our understanding of voter turnout as defined by the number of actual voters divided by the number of registered voters.

Despite intuitions going in that direction, the analysis of Bolivia and Mexico (two countries with restrictive external voting legislation) does not necessarily prove that larger numbers of migrants would have registered and voted from abroad if less restrictive legislation existed. The case of Belgium however, exemplifies how this is just so. Belgium moved from a very restrictive external voting system in 1999 (pushing registration and voting requirements to ridiculous and costly extremes) to more flexible legislation in 2002. From less than 20 voters in 1999, Belgium now experiences the participation of over 100,000 voters in both the 2003 and 2007 legislative federal elections. This extreme example underlines the necessity to look at the details of external voting legislation in order to understand voter turnout.

As I have shown above, the analysis of registration requirements must also always consider the political negotiation at the basis of the adoption of these rules: as the adoption of external voting legislation anticipates supporters (convinced that external voters would vote for them) and opponents (convinced of the contrary). In debating on registration procedures, the very content of external voting legislation thus often reflects the power that different political parties have at the time of adoption of the law.

More precisely, which elements of the registration procedures should one pay attention to? A crucial difference between the Latin American and European case studies concerns the *initiative to register*. In the case of Belgium and most importantly Italy, the authorities contact emigrant voters and invite them to vote. Voters simply have to respond (in the case of Italy, the only way of not voting from abroad is to actually throw away the electoral package, since registration is automatic). In Bolivia and Mexico, on the contrary, it is the migrants themselves who must request voting rights. They must send a form to authorities and ask to vote from abroad. Because consulates are kept away from electoral processes, the electoral authorities in charge of the registration process do not even have a database to use to send invitations to vote from abroad. They must thus have to go out on the field and look for potential voters in migrants' destination countries. It is therefore the responsibility of migrants to get in touch with home country authorities if they wish to vote. The way voter registers are constructed (from scratch, or based existing consular registries) is thus another element to consider.

Despite comparably restrictive laws, Mexico and Bolivia have performed differently in registration figures in absolute terms (see table 1). Not only does this data inform us that registration requirements are not the only variables to bear in mind, it also points out to the implementation of the existing procedures by electoral authorities as an element capable of influencing registration and turnout.

Next to registration requirements, the electoral system is a second institutional variable underlined by Geys, which stresses the influence of majoritarian and proportional systems on voter turnout. In the case of external voter turnout, I however wish to broaden this category to *electoral machinery* focusing on three elements related to the access to voting rights abroad that my analysis points at.

First, there is *the type of election* to which emigrants are invited to participate. The case of Italy where emigrants can vote at referenda and legislative elections clearly underlines the

great interest of emigrants for legislative elections than for referenda on very specific issues that do not raise a lot of interest even among emigrant voters. Now, the cases studies included cases where migrants vote for legislative elections and presidential elections. The influence of the seat(s) at stake in the elections seems to deserve greater attention. While Presidential elections tend to diminish the migrants' capacity to influence a much greater pool of voters (therefore potentially influencing negatively turnout), presidents –as it was argued in Mexico - represent the Nation abroad and are thus a prime political symbol to which emigrants could refer. On the other hand, legislative elections allow emigrants to have representatives in home countries that can be held accountable (especially in Italy where seats are reserved for emigrant MP's and senators; see *political variable*).

Second, the *voting modality* through which emigrants can express their vote is a variable to which attention should be paid to. While this variable does not necessarily affect registration, it certainly does affect actual participation after registration. Out of the four cases, Belgium is the only one to give several options to emigrants on how to cast their vote from abroad (NB. Italians abroad can come back to vote on the national territory if they ask in advance). Looking at Belgium in particular, we can actually determine that when voters are given the choice, they overwhelmingly chose to vote by mail (67.6% of all Belgian voters chose that modality in 2003) over any other modality. Having to go to the consulate on Election Day (like Bolivians do) could unsurprisingly be a disincentive to register as an external voter. It may, however, not be a disincentive to vote once registered, as data indicates that turnout among emigrants voting in person at consulates is higher than those who choose to vote by mail (see table 1).

The third element is the *obligation to vote, which has already* been pointed out by Geys in his analysis. In the examples of Bolivia and Belgium, we have however underscored the technical difficulty to implement such rules abroad. As a consequence of this, electoral authorities implicitly or explicitly renounce to enforce this rule abroad. Nonetheless, interviews with voters declaring to be afraid of administrative complications with their

home country if they do not vote seem to support the idea that the obligation to vote may play a part in voter turnout abroad as well.

Table 1. Voter turnout in Italy, Belgium, Mexico and Bolivia

Country	*Size of external voters in registry*	*N of actual voters abroad*	*Turnout abroad (N voters/N registry)*	*Turnout among residents*
Italy	2,707,382*	1,053,864	28.93%	81.4%
Mexico	40,876	32,632	79.8%	58.55%**
Belgium	114,677	Not available	87.64% (personal or proxy voters at consulate) 65.95% (mail voters)	91.9%
Bolivia	169,096	125,101	73,9%	95,25%

* automatic registration in place, **Including external voters.

4.2 The political variables

Under the political variables category, I chose to list different variables related to party politics and how they could potentially affect emigrant voter turnout. First, the *political culture* in place in the home country should be looked at as a factor influencing external voter turnout. Just like Mexicans abroad did not demand external voting when elections where thought to be rigged, the influence on voter turnout of regimes in which elections do not present democratic guarantees should be examined.

Second, instead of underling the importance of the closeness of an election, I prefer to stress the *perceived importance of the election* as a factor influencing turnout. Before they were granted the right to vote from abroad, Mexicans and Bolivians abroad already tended to involve themselves in home country politics as the coming elections was perceived to be crucial for the country's democratic evolution (cf. Mexico 2000 and Bolivia 2005). In that sense, the idea that the election could contribute to regime change or substantial reforms – rather than elections closeness- could prove a strong incentive. Looking at the MAS's desire to get emigrants involved in the process of change it tries to initiate in Bolivia, this certainly

appears as an interesting variable. Similarly, Belgians who do not vote from abroad have admitted during interviews that if the unity of the federal state were at risk, they would register and vote.

Third, the different dimensions in the *presence of political parties abroad* must also be looked at. This variable obviously includes the *capacity to campaign* and *spend money* on electoral advertising *abroad* which, as we have seen, was prohibited in the case of Mexico. This left the burden of advertising about the coming Mexican presidential elections on the electoral authorities' shoulders. This is certainly all the more frustrating for the Mexican political parties that they already had structures in the United States before the 2006 elections. Italian parties, on the contrary, are allowed to do so but only the left-wing coalition took this possibility seriously in 2006. Campaigning abroad is certainly one of the largest difficulties associated with external voting, as it implies costly and time-consuming efforts to reach voters, who are sometimes disbursed throughout many different parts of the world, and whom (despite the existence of electronic media) have often less access to political information about their home countries. In that sense, *the connection of political parties with sister political parties in emigrants' countries of residence* can prove a crucial advantage. The Italian left-wing coalition, again, benefited from the support of many socialist, social-democratic and Green parties in different parts of the world before the 2006 elections. Similarly, Izquierda Unida in Spain encouraged Bolivian voters to register and vote for Morales. As we advise below to also look at the influence of the political context in which emigrants reside, this variable is certainly an additional one to look at.

4.3 Demographic and socio-economic variables

Under the demographic and socio-economic variables, I choose to list different characteristics of the emigrants' lives abroad as factors influencing the willingness to become involved in home country politics. The first two of these variables could have however also belonged to other categories of variables.

First, I perceive from the case studies that *the distance that separates the voter from the elected official* seems to be a relevant indicator. I do not refer here to what Geys had underscored as the size of the electoral district, which tends to increase information on candidates and therefore turnout. Rather, I refer to a socio-political variable that addresses the stake the emigrant has in the election (in that sense, it is close to the *perceived importance variable* described above). I have already mentioned that different legislation on external voting makes votes cast abroad more or less decisive, according to the type of election. However, I have not yet touched upon the issue of *reserved seats in Parliament,* and how they affect turnout. The system in Italy, which combines reserved seats with the preferential vote, forces Italian candidates abroad to aggressively campaign among voters in electoral districts that are as big as one (or several) continent(s). Despite the fact that the Italian Constitution prohibits imperative mandates, the extra-territorial constituency creates a strong connection between Italian emigrants, emigrants MPs and senators elected abroad. In other countries, such as Belgium, voters participate marginally in electing MP's whose election largely do not depend on voters abroad. Comparing turnout between countries that have reserved seats and those who do not can help identify the influence of this factor.

Second, while Geys has underscored the role of previous turnout in existing research on voter turnout, I argue that the *first time effect* should be paid attention to in the case of external voting, as it has recently developed in different parts of the world. The idea here is to check for a potential increase in interest in voting from abroad when migrants have been prevented from doing so for a long time, or when the election in the home country is actually the first chance in their lifetime to participate in an election (e.g. because they left the home country before reaching the voting age and/or because they do not have voting rights in the country of residence). Opposing this view, the difficulty with which external voting legislation is often adopted (sometimes a few months before the election, like in

Mexico and Bolivia) and the difficulty to inform emigrants on their newfound rights can also mean that first external voting experiences may mean lower turnout and registration.

A third variable, the *migration profile of individual migrants and communities,* is of a much more general nature, and is in line with existing literature on the socio-economic variables of voter turnout. The importance of this variable is particularly striking when assessing the differences in registration, voter turnout and electoral results of similar national groups of emigrants across different countries of residence. The differences in voter turnout among Italians in South America and Italians in Europe point to the specific characteristics of Italian communities over there, and the socio-political context in which they live. Similarly, the fact that Bolivians in Spain who exceeded their registration target and split their vote between the two candidates prompts us to look at the specific characteristics of this population. Also, the fact that Mexicans proceeding from traditional migrant-sending regions are under-represented among voters, and that migrants residing in Europe are over-represented in the voting population indicates that socio-economic characteristics should be looked at when trying to explain external voter turnout. These characteristics obviously include: the levels of education, occupation and income that have traditionally been examined in turnout studies. Moreover, these examples also invite us to look at migration-specific factors such as: timing of arrival, access to citizenship in the country of residence (and tolerance of migrants' linkages with the home country), and density of the migrant association's network in the country of residence. These are just a few of the various migrant-specific factors that my comparative analysis points to, and deserve to be looked at more closely with appropriate methods.

Conclusion: The "what," the "how," the "where," and the "when" matter

I started this paper by stating what could be perceived as a possible contradiction. One the one hand, external voting laws when implemented usually lead to low voter turnout

abroad. On the other hand, an increasing number of states have implemented such legislation over the last decade. Looking at the existing literature in voter turnout and analyzing four countries that have implemented external voting in recent years, I have eventually come up with a list of variables to be assessed when analyzing registration, turnout, and results of elections that permit external voting. More generally, however, this paper proposes a comprehensive approach towards understanding electoral behavior from abroad.

I have indeed clarified the importance of defining *what* is meant by voter turnout when analyzing external voting. I have repeatedly referred to registration levels and voter turnout as different indicators. With respect to the latter, I have also indicated the ambiguities with respect to its analysis. On the one hand, there are different kinds of ratios that can be referred to as "voter turnout," and these ratios take absolutely no consideration of the differences in registration procedures by which emigrants are able to vote. These inconsistencies strongly question the capacity of these indicators to reflect a general disinterest of emigrants to vote in home country elections. On the other hand, the data on voter turnout (no matter how it is defined) is not always available, while different data on voter turnout is available in countries that allow external voting. This situation too makes comparisons very difficult.

Comparing voter turnout in order to determine the success or failure of external voting experiments is a second issue that I have approached in the paper. Indeed, It appears indispensible if we wish to isolate variables that affect voter turnout. But *how* can we compare turnout when laws are so different from one country to the next? One important conclusion of this paper is to argue in a similar line to Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004: 1191) that, when for political as for other transnational practices, "within-group comparisons across different national incorporation systems" are necessary. The cases of Mexico, Italy and particularly Bolivia have all revealed differences in registration and turnout according to countries of residence. These kinds of comparisons allow for the

neutralization of the effect of registration requirements (and the law in general) to see how other political and socio-economic factors might be at play.

On a final note, this paper has stressed the importance of taking into consideration the political context in which external voting legislation is adopted to understand variations voter turnout. The extension of the electorate is indeed never a politically neutral issue. When the political relevance of external voting is considered, voter turnout is not the only indicator that should be evaluated. A recurring fear among opponents to external voting is that voters abroad could cast the decisive votes in an election. The case of Italy was certainly presented as such, even though the senators elected in Piedmont weighed as much as the one elected in South America. However, the supposed decisive character of external voters very much depends on *when* and *where* their votes are counted. Had votes in Italy be counted in Italy before others, it would have been less likely to be presented as decisive at the end of the count. Similarly, counting emigrant votes along with residents' votes in the same electoral district, like in Belgium, is less likely to attract the same level of attention that the extra-territorial constituency has attracted in Italy.

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