

## Webinar

# The Expat Vote: Electoral rights, turnout and impact of voting by non-resident citizens in the US and Europe

27 October 2020

Online - Zoom

Scientific organiser: [Rainer Bauböck](#) | European University Institute

## Introduction

Over the last fifty years most states have expanded their electorate by offering voting rights to their citizens residing abroad. Turnout has, however, remained almost consistently low and only in a few occasions has the expat vote had a significant impact on electoral outcomes. While we already know a lot about electoral rights of non-resident citizens, their effective access to the vote and attempts to mobilise or demobilise them have been rarely studied comparatively.

In the forthcoming US elections, the incumbent president has cast doubt on the validity of postal ballots, which threatens to make the votes cast by American expats a special bone of contention in case of a disputed election outcome. In Europe, Viktor Orbán has successfully mobilised ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries to support his increasingly authoritarian government. Recep Tayyip Erdogan has pursued a similar strategy, which has been strongly resisted in EU countries with large numbers of immigrants from Turkey. The introduction or strengthening of emigrant voting rights in Italy, France, Portugal and Spain has received less attention, although the former three countries illustrate an approach where expats cannot merely cast a vote but also get special representation in parliament. The GLOBALCIT webinar will bring together four experts from different world regions that cover all these cases.

The webinar is organised by the [Global Citizenship Observatory](#)

## Programme

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18.00 - 18.10 Chair: [Rainer Bauböck](#) | European University Institute

Welcome

18.10 - 18.25 **Overseas Americans: Voting in 50 States, but May Provide a Margin of Victory**

[Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels](#) | Kent University Brussels

While US citizens living overseas have had the right to vote since 1976, it was only in 2000 with the contested Bush-Gore election (and a difference of 537 votes in Florida) that overseas voters received widespread attention. Both the Republican and Democratic parties are represented overseas, although only Democrats Abroad is a formal part of the party structure. All overseas ballots are counted in one of 50 states, meaning that diverse rules apply to voter registration and ballot return; the constitutional and federal structure of the United States strongly shapes voting and overseas voting. Overseas ballots are thus also distributed across constituencies, meaning that they can tip only very tight elections. This year has seen greater GOTV (“get out the vote”) efforts on the part of Democrats Abroad, greater interest and greater turn-out among overseas voters than in typical years – they may yet make the difference in a number of tight elections — assuming that they are able to return ballots on time, and that signatures and other details are judged to be correct.

18.25 - 18.40 **Origin or Destination? Country of Residence and Party Choice of French and Italian Emigrant Voters\***

[Irina Ciornei](#) | IBEI, Barcelona Institute for International Studies

Studies of emigrant voting in homeland elections posit that the migration process transforms emigrants’ political views and preferences by exposing them to more consolidated democratic institutions in the context of reception. Within this perspective, emigrants from countries with low democratic quality would tend to systematically differ in terms of voting patterns when compared to the electorates back home by voting for parties campaigning for democratic development and against corrupt and authoritarian incumbents. However, the literature insufficiently discusses how migrants from developed democracies reproduce or break with the voting patterns of homeland electorates. Based on an original dataset of emigrant voting patterns per country of residence, the presentation discusses the extent to which French and Italian external voters respectively mirror the political choices back home during the last three legislative elections. Moreover, we inquire how their voting patterns systematically differ between countries of residence with different levels of democracy, economic development and government orientation

\*This presentation is part of a research project developed in collaboration with Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen

18.40 - 18.55 **Votes of Honor: Lessons of Non-Resident Enfranchisement in Hungary**

[Szabolcs Pogonyi](#) | Central European University, Vienna

This presentation will analyze the voting patterns of transborder Hungarians who received voting non-resident citizenship from the Orbán government in 2010. In the presentation, I will briefly overview kin-citizenship practices and non-resident voting in Central Eastern European states. Then I will show through analyzing election data and 51 in-depth interviews with non-resident voters in the neighboring countries that newly enfranchised voters wanted to express their honor for Fidesz, who gave them citizenship and voting rights. The sense of obligation to honor Fidesz’ decision to offer them citizenship lead some left-leaning as well as far-right

voters to support Fidesz rather than other parties that they sympathized with.

18.55 - 19.10    **Expatriate Voting amidst Diaspora Diplomacy and Transnational Authoritarianism: Insights from the Turkish Case**

[Bahar Baser](#) | University of Coventry, UK

Whether affected by shifting norms or changing dynamics of electoral games engendered by democratisation, or envisaged as part of diaspora governance strategies of home-states, enfranchisement of non-resident citizens has been an internationally diffused phenomenon particularly since the 1990s. Turkey, as a “sending-state” now for more than five decades, enfranchised its expatriates in a rather limited way in 1986. Even though Turkish citizens abroad had been voicing demands and putting pressure on political authorities in Turkey for the introduction of out-of country voting since the 1990s, the introduction of the set of legislative and administrative measures effectively enabling external voting had to wait until 2012. This coincided with the Justice and Development Party’s “diaspora opening”, a strategy that foresees active engagement with Turks living abroad. In this presentation, I will unpack the motivations that played a role in the formulation of Turkey’s diaspora governance policies from a public diplomacy/ nation branding perspective with a specific focus on expatriate voting rights and transnational election campaigns. I will then explain how the authoritarian turn in the homeland shifted the focus of the home state actors from diaspora diplomacy to authoritarian regime consolidation at home and abroad. Finally, I will analyse the reactions that Turkey’s transnational electoral mobilisation received in several European countries and assess the limits of state-led diaspora governance in the context of home-hostland nexus.

19.10 - 19.30    **Q&A**