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Deterritorialized Representation: Comparing Overseas Constituencies in France, Italy, and Portugal

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Abstract: This study examines the rise of extraterritorial parliamentary representation as a key dimension of contemporary democratic governance. While many countries grant citizens abroad the right to vote, a smaller group has institutionalized overseas constituencies that allow diasporas to elect their own representatives. Conceptualizing these developments as forms of deterritorialized governance, the paper examines how states extend political authority beyond their borders and incorporate diasporas into national political systems by analyzing the institutional practices through which overseas representation is organized and implemented. Focusing on established European democracies such as France, Italy, and Portugal, the study draws on original fieldwork, including interviews with parliamentarians, bureaucrats, and academics, to examine both institutional design and practical implementation. The findings demonstrate that, despite their institutionalization, overseas representation systems remain dynamic and shaped by domestic political considerations, administrative capacity, and transnational realities. By highlighting the spatial organization of voting, campaigning, and representation, this research contributes to the literature on transnational citizenship and offers a comparative framework for understanding extraterritorial political practices.

Keywords: Overseas Parliamentary Representations, France, Italy, Portugal, Elections

Öz: Bu çalışma, çağdaş demokratik yönetişimin önemli bir boyutu olarak sınır ötesi (ekstraterritoryal) parlamenter temsilin yükselişini incelemektedir. Birçok ülke yurtdışında yaşayan vatandaşlarına oy kullanma hakkı tanırken, daha sınırlı sayıdaki ülke diasporaların kendi temsilcilerini seçmelerine olanak tanıyan yurtdışı seçim bölgelerini kurumsallaştırmıştır. Bu gelişmeleri deteritoryalize olmuş yönetişim biçimleri olarak kavramsallaştıran makale, devletlerin siyasi otoriteyi sınırlarının ötesine nasıl genişlettiğini ve diasporaları ulusal siyasi sistemlere nasıl dahil ettiğini analiz etmektedir. Fransa, İtalya ve Portekiz gibi yerleşik Avrupa demokrasilerine odaklanan çalışma, parlamenterler, bürokratlar ve akademisyenlerle yapılan görüşmeleri içeren özgün saha araştırmasına dayanmaktadır ve hem kurumsal tasarımı hem de pratik uygulamayı incelemektedir. Bulgular, bu sistemlerin kurumsallaşmış olmasına rağmen, yurtdışı temsil mekanizmalarının hâlâ dinamik olduğunu ve iç siyasi faktörler, idari kapasite ve ulusötesi gerçeklikler tarafından şekillendirildiğini göstermektedir. Oy verme, kampanya yürütme ve temsil süreçlerinin mekânsal örgütlenmesini vurgulayan bu araştırma, ulusötesi vatandaşlık literatürüne katkı sunmakta ve ekstraterritoryal siyasi pratiklerin anlaşılmasına yönelik karşılaştırmalı bir çerçeve önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yurtdışı Parlamento Temsilleri, Fransa, İtalya, Portekiz, Seçimler

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Introduction

The expansion of political rights beyond territorial borders has become a defining feature of contemporary democratic governance. Approximately 150 countries grant their citizens abroad the right to vote and participate in political processes (Anaz and Köse, 2020; Wellman, 2022). Over time, this practice has evolved from external voting into more advanced forms of inclusion, including overseas constituencies through which diasporas elect their own parliamentary representatives—now adopted by nearly twenty countries (see Table 1) (Lafleur, 2013; Anaz and Köse, 2020; Aman and Bakken, 2021). These developments reflect a broader shift toward extraterritorial parliamentary representation, through which states extend governance beyond territorial boundaries and incorporate diasporas into a deterritorialized political space (Anaz, 2026). This model is well established, not only in developing contexts, but also in stable European democracies such as France, Italy, and Portugal, where it has become institutionalized, though it remains dynamic and shaped by domestic and transnational factors.

Two key observations emerge from the cases examined in this study. First, diaspora formation in countries such as France, Portugal, and Italy is closely tied to colonial histories, where imperial expansion produced lasting expatriate populations that later became incorporated into national political systems. Second, economic factors—particularly post–World War II labor migration—have also played a crucial role in shaping diaspora formation and political inclusion. Together, these patterns highlight the importance of situating overseas representation systems within their broader socio-historical contexts, even if the full migration trajectory cannot be addressed here.

Table1

Countries with Overseas Electoral Districts

Country	**Type of Overseas Representation**	**Number of Seats for Citizens Abroad**	**Current Status (2025)**	**Notes**
Algeria	Reserved overseas seats	8 deputies	**Active**	Stable diaspora constituencies
Angola	Reserved overseas seats	3	**Inactive / irregular**	Legal provision exists; practice inconsistent
Cape Verde	Reserved overseas seats	6 deputies	**Active**	Long-standing, stable model

Country	**Type of Overseas Representation**	**Number of Seats for Citizens Abroad**	**Current Status (2025)**	**Notes**
Colombia	Reserved overseas seat	1 deputy	**Active (reduced)**	Reduced from 2 to 1 in 2018
Croatia	Diaspora constituency	3 deputies	**Active**	Established since 2011
Dominican Republic	Reserved overseas seats	7 deputies	**Active**	Highly institutionalized
Ecuador	Reserved overseas seats	6 deputies	**Active**	USA/Canada, Europe, Latin America
France	Overseas constituencies	11 deputies (+12 senators)	**Active**	Consolidated model
Guinea-Bissau	Overseas districts	2 deputies	**Active (fragile)**	Elections affected by instability
Italy	Overseas constituency	8 deputies + 4 senators	**Active**	Flagship extraterritorial model
Lithuania	Overseas constituency	1 deputy	**Active**	Created 2020
North Macedonia	Diaspora seats (conditional)	Up to 3 deputies	**Conditional**	Seats depend on turnout thresholds
Mozambique	Overseas constituencies	2 deputies	**Active**	Low visibility but stable
Peru	Reserved overseas seats	2 deputies	**Active**	Dedicated diaspora MPs
Portugal	Reserved overseas seats	4 deputies	**Active**	In force since 1976
Romania	Reserved overseas seats (bicameral)	4 deputies + 2 senators	**Active**	Dual-chamber representation
Tunisia	Overseas constituencies	10 deputies	**Formally active, weakened**	Reduced from 18; post-2021 authoritarian turn

Country	Type of Overseas Representation	Number of Seats for Citizens Abroad	Current Status (2025)	Notes
Mali	Overseas constituency (former)	6 deputies (planned/ used)	**Discontinued**	Suspended after coups
Mauritania	Overseas diaspora seat (former)	1 deputy	**Discontinued**	Abolished in reforms

Overseas representation systems extend beyond the provision of voting rights from abroad and are increasingly understood in the literature as part of the broader extraterritorialization of citizenship. In Michel Laguerre's framework, "cosmonationality" refers to the extension of sovereignty beyond territorial borders, whereby states maintain structured relationships with their populations abroad. While states have long engaged diasporas through institutional channels, extraterritorial parliamentary representation deepens this relationship by enabling citizens abroad to elect their own representatives in the homeland. In *The Postdiaspora Condition*, Laguerre (2017) advances this argument through the concept of the "postdiaspora," which captures a shift from viewing diasporas as marginal communities to recognizing them as integral components of transnational state structures. He demonstrates how contemporary states institutionalize engagement with overseas populations through policies in areas such as social protection, education, and security, giving rise to what he terms the "cosmonational state." Within this framework, diasporas are incorporated into governance through legal, administrative, and political mechanisms, reshaping both citizenship and state sovereignty.

Laguerre's earlier work, *Parliament and Diaspora in Europe* (2013), is widely regarded as a pioneering contribution to the study of overseas representation. By examining France, Italy, and Croatia, he illustrates how European states institutionalize transnational political membership through overseas voting practices. Complementing this perspective, Collyer and Vathi (2007) and Lafleur (2013) emphasize that extraterritorial citizenship practices, particularly voting from abroad, contribute to democratization, state transformation, and the evolution of migration policies. Carter (2011) further argues that the extension of voting rights to diaspora populations is often shaped by strategic considerations, including the size of the diaspora electorate, domestic political competition, and potential partisan advantages. In cases where diaspora populations are large but politically manageable, states may grant limited

representation while expanding voting rights. Building on this, Collyer and Vathi (2007) conceptualize diaspora political participation as a mechanism of state–diaspora engagement and a form of "remote governance," extending from consular voting to parliamentary representation. Similarly, Arconini (2006) and Lobo (2007) describe these arrangements as a form of "bounded inclusion," in which states recognize diaspora populations while limiting their political influence.

Lafleur (2013) further demonstrates that external voting regimes are shaped by migration histories, partisan interests, and administrative capacities, and that states tend to prioritize overseas voting where diaspora communities hold political significance. Overseas constituencies thus reflect a balance between inclusion and control, acknowledging emigrants as members of the political community while confining their influence within defined institutional limits. Bauböck (2007) similarly argues that diaspora engagement policies are driven by multiple objectives, including the expansion of citizenship rights, democratic responsibility, lobbying, and the assertion of sovereignty (Brand, 2010; Lafleur, 2013; Gamlen, 2015; Collyer; Rhodes and Harutyunyan, 2010; Kernalegenn, Pellen, and Smith, 2021). Additional motivations include securing economic and political support (Lafleur, 2015), promoting cosmopolitan nationalism (Laguerre, 2013), and adopting populist strategies of outreach (Mehrez et al., 2023).

Despite these contributions, the literature remains limited in its use of fieldwork to examine the practical functioning of extraterritorial parliamentary representation (Laguerre, 2013; Østergaard-Nielsen et al., 2019). Few studies systematically explore the purposes, implementation challenges, campaign dynamics, and broader implications of overseas representation through interviews with political actors and experts. Rather than providing an exhaustive account of overseas representation in France, Italy, and Portugal, this article examines how these established European democracies operationalize extraterritorial parliamentary representation in practice. Addressing this gap, the study combines institutional analysis with in-person interviews conducted with parliamentarians, election experts, and academics to illuminate how deterritorialized governance is experienced and implemented by political actors. While primarily descriptive, it contributes empirically grounded insights into the practical functioning of these systems and conceptualizes overseas representation as a set of spatially organized political practices—including voting, campaigning, and representation—through which states engage with transnational political spaces.

Methodology

This study is based on face-to-face interviews conducted with diaspora representatives (members of parliament and senators), election officials, and academics in France, Italy, and Portugal. The article forms part of a broader comparative research project examining six countries with overseas parliamentary representation systems: France, Italy, Portugal, Colombia, Croatia, and Tunisia. Due to space limitations and the different analytical focus of this article, only the three European cases are presented here.

Interviews were carried out in a range of settings, including parliamentary and senate buildings, as well as more informal locations such as cafés, university campuses, and business offices. The duration and structure of the interviews varied considerably: some proceeded without interruption, while others were constrained by legislative duties. In certain cases, interviewees steered the conversation toward issues they considered most important, whereas in others, the interaction followed a more structured format. Language barriers occasionally posed challenges to communication. The sample included both newly elected representatives and long-serving legislators. Notably, experienced senators provided particularly valuable insights into the practical functioning of overseas representation systems, reflecting a depth of institutional knowledge. For this reason, their perspectives on extraterritorial governance retain analytical relevance even years after the interviews were conducted.

The interview sample consisted of key stakeholders from all three countries. From France, six diaspora senators and two diaspora deputies were interviewed. From Italy, the sample included two diaspora senators, one diaspora deputy, and one election expert. In Portugal, interviews were conducted with one diaspora deputy, two academics specializing in overseas representation, and three professionals from the Ministry of Interior with expertise in electoral administration abroad.

Although the number of interviews differs across the three cases, this imbalance should be understood in relation to the institutional characteristics of each country's overseas representation system. The number of diaspora representatives varies considerably between countries. For example, Portugal elects only four members of parliament from overseas constituencies; consequently, interviewing one diaspora deputy represents approximately 25 percent of the country's overseas parliamentary delegation. Furthermore, all overseas representatives in the three countries were contacted and invited to participate in the study, but not all agreed to be interviewed. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of each system, interviews were therefore supplemented with election experts, senior bureaucrats, and academics possessing extensive knowledge of overseas representation.

This study acknowledges that the three cases are not fully comparable in terms of the number of representatives interviewed. However, the objective of the research is not to present a statistical representation but instead to develop an in-depth understanding of how extraterritorial parliamentary representation operates in practice. Accordingly, the analytical value of the study lies in the depth of the interviews and the triangulation of perspectives rather than in the absolute number of participants. This qualitative approach is therefore appropriate for conceptualizing the institutional logic and practical functioning of overseas representation systems across different national contexts.

Country Analysis and Discussions

France

The representation of French citizens living abroad has its roots in the colonial period (Laguerre, 2013). Early debates emerged around the taxation of colonial territories such as Saint-Domingue without corresponding political representation, leading to demands for inclusion in the French parliament. As commercial ties between the colonies and the metropole strengthened, representation gradually expanded to include colonial populations, allowing their concerns to be addressed in parliamentary debates. Lobbying efforts by colonists and merchants in the metropolitan center further accelerated this process and contributed to the institutionalization of overseas representation. Following the 1789 Revolution, representation was extended to free citizens, including Blacks and natives, often through quota-based mechanisms that also served to protect colonial interests. Laguerre (2013) interprets this development as an early example of "cosmonationality," whereby national representation extended beyond territorial boundaries into transnational spaces.

Institutional developments continued in the post–World War II period. The 1946 Constitution of the Fourth Republic introduced a parliamentary structure that included a consultative council, within which the representation of French citizens abroad was formally organized. The National Assembly determined that advisors would represent citizens living in Europe, the Americas, and Asia-Oceania, while separate provisions were made for former colonies in Africa (Laguerre, 2013). As decolonization progressed, French citizens residing in newly independent states became part of a modern diaspora, bringing renewed attention to their political representation. In this context, figures such as Senator Louis Duvernois emphasized that representing citizens abroad was not merely a matter of addressing their concerns, but rather a continuation of a longstanding political tradition in France.

Duvernois:

> This is an old story. It was established in 1927 and still exists today as a recognized public interest association for French citizens abroad. At that time [before the war], it was a French initiative established in Switzerland. It was the idea of representing French citizens abroad and was close to the power of the French people [it was a pro-people idea].
>
> After World War II, in 1947-48, the initiative for a union of French citizens abroad was established in its new format. This council would be called the Conseil supérieur des Français de l'étranger [High Council of French Citizens Abroad]. Thus, we moved from a collaborative dimension to a highly political one. The first thing the council did was to transfer the representation of French citizens abroad to the Senate. The number of senators has gradually increased, reaching 12 today. The senators have successfully transferred the power of the people. In 2012, with a new initiative, 11 deputies were added to the existing 12 senators to represent French citizens abroad in the National Assembly. So today, 23 people [12 senators and 11 deputies] are responsible for representing French citizens abroad.

The representative organization, which evolved into the Overseas Electoral College, was also represented by four major organizations that have existed for many years and form the basis of France's strong relationship with its diaspora: the Union of French Chambers of Commerce and Industry Abroad, the Federation of French Professors Abroad, the Federation of Former French Combatants Living Abroad, and the Union of French Abroad (UFE). In 2016, the committee, which became the AFE (l'Assemblée des Français de l'étranger), also formed the structure of the assembly of French citizens living abroad. A constitutional amendment on July 24, 2008, also regulated the representation of French citizens living abroad in the National Assembly. The representation of French citizens in the Senate was considered to complete the representation that was lacking in the Chamber of Deputies.

Elections abroad

Senators must travel around the globe to ensure the (re)election of candidates nominated by themselves or their parties, and they also work to get candidates who share their political leanings elected to the Overseas Electoral College. In other words, if they can get a significant portion of France's 155 members, also known as the *electoral* college, to be people close to them, they will have a significant advantage in the next senatorial election. The candidates for the Overseas Electoral College are elected by the votes of French voters living in their own electoral district. Although there is no "electoral district" requirement for the election of senators, senators campaign in certain regions for logical reasons. For example, one senator is responsible for the North American electoral district, which is divided into the regions of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Alaska, Hawaii, and Guam. The

election campaigns of candidates for the Electoral College are conducted through diaspora organizations operating in this region. Similarly, senatorial candidates run their campaigns on existing French television channels, newspapers published by the diaspora, magazines, and websites.

Conducting an open campaign is the most risky and difficult part of this work. MP Christophe Prémat[1], noting that conducting an open campaign carries the risk of violating the host country's sovereignty, says that great care must be taken in this regard. Prémat adds, "It is difficult to campaign in another country. The issue of another country's sovereignty comes into play. For example, you sometimes encounter difficulties transferring money for your election campaign… The internet is the most strategic tool for communicating with our voters." Premat states that there have been no problems so far, particularly in his own constituency of Northern Europe, attributing this to the maturity of European democracy and the mutual respect with which the campaign and election process are conducted. Premat says that French senators and deputies never comment on or evaluate the internal affairs of the countries where they campaign, nor do they concern themselves with the internal issues of those countries. Of course, this does not mean that the problems of French citizens living abroad are not raised in reasonable diplomatic discussions with the host country. On the contrary, he says that senators and deputies are particularly interested in helping French citizens living abroad to resolve the problems they encounter in their host countries. For example, issues such as the situation of bilingual schools or the extension of legal rights arising from dual citizenship are always on the agenda of French parliamentarians.

Senator Louis Duvernois emphasizes that diaspora election campaigns are inherently limited due to both physical constraints and the structural boundaries of political representation. Candidates are unable to reach all electoral districts or engage with every French citizen abroad and therefore concentrate their efforts on areas with high population density, often organizing small meetings in venues such as cultural centers or churches. Beyond these localized efforts, much of the campaign relies on informal communication and word-of-mouth. A central role in these campaigns is played by diaspora associations aligned with political parties, which serve as key channels for outreach and mobilization. Prominent examples include the conservative UFE (Union of French Citizens Abroad) and the left-leaning ADFE (Democratic Association of French Citizens Abroad), which maintain close ties with parties in France—historically the UMP and the PS, respectively. These

1 The interview was conducted by the author on June 22, 2016, at the Parliament building in Paris.

associations not only facilitate communication between candidates and voters but also shape electoral outcomes, as members often support candidates endorsed by their affiliated organizations, making them indispensable instruments of overseas campaigning.

Overseas travel

French senators, although not directly elected by voters, frequently visit their constituencies. They travel around the world to campaign, particularly during the election for members of the Overseas Electoral College, who elect senators. For example, Christophe-André Frassa says he sometimes makes a series of visits lasting months for the candidates for the Overseas Electoral College supported by the UFE group, of which he is a member. However, visits to electoral districts are somewhat more complex for members of parliament. Since MPs are directly elected by voters, it is in the candidate's interest to meet as many voters as possible during a trip, as each person represents one vote for the MP. This situation also entails a significant travel burden for MPs. In fact, considering the size of some constituencies, it is not possible to visit every part of the constituency. Even when the travel burden for candidates is calculated solely in terms of cost, it amounts to a large sum. As it is therefore impossible to visit all the countries within a constituency, candidates make their election campaigns logistically feasible by visiting the cities and towns within their constituencies where the French population is concentrated.

Claudine Schmid[2], a member of parliament elected from the sixth electoral district, expresses the difficulty of the issue as follows:

> French political parties have no representatives abroad. Only a few parties have recently started opening representative offices. Of course, this is a major obstacle because campaigning abroad is costly. If you don't get at least 5% of the vote, you can't get your election campaign expenses reimbursed by the state. That's why every party nominates candidates for overseas parliamentary seats, but very few candidates actually go abroad to campaign.

Despite all this, the business visits made by senators and deputies in the course of their duties are covered by the state. In addition, the Overseas Electoral Commission and other members of the Assembly of French Citizens Abroad, who are required to come to Paris twice a year, carry out the necessary lobbying activities in the capital as much as possible. Again, their visits to the capital are considered by the state to be part of their legislative duties. In addition, both senators and deputies frequently

2 The interview was conducted by the author on June 25, 2016, at the Parliament building in Paris.

visit their constituencies at the invitation of a French school or cultural association abroad. However, above all, the opportunities offered by today's technology also make the work of French parliamentarians easier. In most places, all meetings, and even election campaigns, are conducted online when necessary. For example, Deputy Schmid says the following about her election campaigning online:

> Running an election campaign is, of course, a matter of budget here as it is everywhere else. Therefore, the entire campaign has to be conducted online. We access the voter lists, and most of our citizens living abroad provide their email addresses. We send our election programs via these emails. If we have the opportunity to hold a meeting, we invite them to the meeting via email.

While visits abroad by parliamentarians have become routine in some European countries, such visits are impossible for countries with overseas constituencies covering dozens of countries. Since everyone is aware of this reality, campaigns, like elections, are conducted almost entirely online. Of course, this generally applies to parliamentary elections. In Senate elections, since all members of the Overseas Electoral Board are required to cast their votes in person, online voting is not possible. Although senators and members of parliament make full use of the opportunities provided by the internet, this does not change the fact that they are required to shuttle between their constituencies and Paris throughout the year.

Voting abroad

French citizens living abroad vote in both presidential elections and elections for AFE members and deputies. Until 2012, French citizens living abroad indirectly elected senators and voted for the president. Since 2012, French citizens living abroad have been directly electing their representatives to parliament. Senators are elected through AFE members. In other words, French citizens living abroad elect 155 AFE members, and these 155 AFE members elect 12 senators. This procedure is still in place for these senators.

It is estimated that approximately 2.5 million French citizens live abroad. It is known that 1.5 million of them are registered to vote. Elections are held directly, by proxy, or electronically at French embassies and consulates. Although France has successfully used the electronic voting system in parliamentary elections since 2012, French citizens living abroad cannot vote electronically in presidential elections. MP Premat explains the reason for this, stating, "If any objection or technical malfunction arises, the entire election could become questionable and subject to challenge, which is why electronic voting is not used in presidential elections". He adds that since a reduced constituency system is applied in parliamentary elections, elections can be

repeated if necessary, and this situation does not cause much trouble.

Despite all this, French citizens living abroad remain reluctant to go to the polls, whether for the election of AFE members, presidential elections, or parliamentary elections. Voter turnout has never exceeded 20%. The participation rate remains between 14% and 20%. The reasons for this include the higher cost of voting abroad and the fact that it requires extra effort on the part of the voter. Furthermore, the fact that the elections are not considered sufficiently politically motivating also reduces voter turnout. Representative Premat says that some voters are unaware of the existence of their representative and believes that this will change in the medium term with the spread of electronic communication and awareness campaigns on social media.

Taxation and election promise

Congressman Premat broadly divides French citizens living abroad into two groups: "those who go abroad for a short period and those who go abroad for a long period, usually due to marriage or work." The question of which country's tax system applies to French citizens living abroad, particularly for work or marriage, is highly controversial. This is because French citizens living abroad who continue to pay taxes to France believe they have a right to have a say in what happens in France and are very pleased that French citizens living abroad are given representation rights. However, when there is no obligation to pay any taxes to France, the issue of *representation without taxation* arises. For this reason, establishing a more balanced system while granting representation rights to French citizens living abroad is highly desirable. This complex situation is also a frequent issue that arises during the election campaigns of deputies and senators. Representative Schmid says, "We promise to develop a system where voters will pay less tax." "This demand comes mainly from people living abroad who pay taxes in both countries," she says.

It should also be noted that French citizens living abroad, including businesspeople who do not pay taxes in France, nevertheless contribute financially to French schools in their countries of residence—a practice that has been actively supported by successive French governments. Accordingly, nearly all the senators and deputies interviewed emphasized that, during their campaigns abroad, they prioritize improving French educational institutions overseas and establishing a robust scholarship system as central policy goals.

The answers from parliamentarians to the question of how they conduct their election campaigns and what promises they make during these campaigns are very similar. For example, Premat says "nothing" to this question (smiling). Then he adds:

> We have certain issues; education, of course, we support bilingual education. We support schools that provide French-language education. Taxation is also one of the important issues. The situation of businesspeople is also important. They become our natural diplomatic mediators. Then dual citizenship is also one of our important issues. We defend dual citizenship… but I prefer to be more realistic about election promises because our promises have limits, we cannot promise everything… objectively speaking, the US revolution was based on taxation without representation. Sometimes we face the same problem, that is, we provide representation without taxation. Of course, this situation requires understanding. People want more, but what can be done is limited.

MP Schmid lists the promises made to voters as follows:

> There are three issues that concern French citizens living abroad and that we are focusing on. The first is French schools abroad. The issue of improving these schools and, in particular, allocating scholarships. Because these schools are fee-paying, and there is a great need in this regard. We are working on this issue. The second issue is retirement. We are working on this through bilateral agreements. This is because there is an established system in European Union countries, but bilateral agreements may be necessary with other non-EU countries. Another issue concerning French citizens abroad is taxation. We are working to ensure they do not pay more taxes. Another issue is that France has a large number of consulates, but there are measures and concerns aimed at limiting the number of consulates. French citizens are very attached to these consulates, and we are working to ensure that these consulates do not close.

As can be understood, the promises that can be made to French citizens living abroad revolve around education, social rights in the motherland, and improving consular services. This seems sufficient to ensure that French citizens living abroad can maintain their ties with the mainland and feel confident that they have a representative in France.

Communication with voters

While technology facilitates the work of French parliamentarians in their election campaigns, it also provides voters with a fast and productive means of ensuring *the return of* the democratic system, i.e., the consolidation of democracy. MP Premat states that "the internet played a very useful and facilitating role in the election campaign targeting French citizens living abroad and in maintaining contact with them after the election," adding the following:

> We obtain the email addresses of French citizens living abroad [who have registered] through the consulate. From here, we can send emails to everyone. For example, when I go to my constituency, if I am going to hold a meeting, I announce it from here. Again, via email, I send them a weekly brochure describing the work done in parliament. If any

> of my constituents want to meet with me, I also have conversations with them lasting 20-30 minutes during my e-office hours.

MP Schmid also states that she runs her election campaign online in a similar way, receiving feedback from her constituents via the internet during this process, and adds:

> As in the election campaign, the internet is an important factor here too. Our communications take place via email. Again, if our voters have any feedback about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction, they send it to us via email, and they definitely do not hesitate to do so. We also know that our website is being followed. I personally do not use social media much, but most of my colleagues maintain contact with their voters via Twitter.

On diaspora politics

The diaspora representation system undoubtedly means the evolution of politics, law, and legal infrastructure in European countries, such as France and Italy, to a transnational level and the extension of legal sovereignty beyond national borders. It expresses the process of the 'neighborhoodization' of parliamentary practices, as Laguerre puts it (Laguerre, 2013). In this context, France and nations that transnationalize the diaspora representation system in its legal dimension are undoubtedly at the forefront, guaranteeing that their citizens living abroad contribute to the political formation on the mainland, even at a basic level.

In this context, French senators and deputies also view the French example positively in terms of making the diaspora representation system sustainable and spreading it around the world. For example, Deputy Schmid states:

> I believe it is very, very important to preserve this representation system. For example, we can intervene before a law is passed by the Senate or the Assembly. Whereas before, laws were passed without us. We would realize the difficulties of the situation after the law was passed, and then we would have to work on it again. So, we can take control of the situation before things get complicated. This strengthens our democracy.

In addition, Representative Premat believes that the diaspora representation system, while varying according to circumstances and electoral districts, plays an effective role in deepening bilateral relations between countries. Premat even suggests that "the diaspora representation system should also be considered for the European Parliament." The other French senators and deputies I interviewed also share the view that citizens who have left the country should have a voice in democratic developments in the homeland. They regard this form of transnational

democratic participation as an achievement. In other words, it is seen as the evolution of a parliamentary democratic system into a transnational one. Senator Christophe-Andre Frassa also expresses his opinion on this matter, stating, "A well-functioning diaspora representation system must go beyond the expatriate-homeland relationship established through 'remittances'"[3]. He believes that extending the boundaries of democratic representation beyond the geographical borders of that nation should be seen more as the multifaceted construction of a mutual democratic order than as an extraterritorial extension of sovereignty.

France views the participation of its citizens abroad not only as a means of preserving national identity but also as an extension of democratic engagement beyond its borders. The prevailing perspective is that the approximately 2.5 million French citizens living overseas can contribute both to their countries of residence and to France, provided that transnational representation remains functional and sustainable. The significant presence of French communities abroad, particularly in Africa, has encouraged the development of policies aimed at maintaining strong ties with the homeland. Over time, these policies have been linked to broader objectives such as promoting French culture, strengthening diplomatic relations, and facilitating economic exchanges. In this context, diaspora engagement has become a strategic tool for France to expand its political and cultural influence internationally. Strengthening connections with its expatriate population thus serves both domestic and foreign policy goals. Congresswoman Schmid explains the motivation behind political representation for French citizens living abroad as follows:

> People who emigrate from France are French wherever they are. The fact that they have left France does not change the fact that they are French. We are one of the countries that work hardest to maintain these ties. In addition, our schools are a very important factor. There are approximately 450 French schools around the world. Continuing French education in these schools is very important to us.

Senator Christiane Kammermann[4] also emphasizes that French parliamentarians attach great importance to French schools, while also stressing the importance of French retirees living abroad and ensuring their safety, and that this issue is one that requires the attention of the Paris government. The senator highlights the advantages of French citizens living abroad maintaining close ties with France and insists that the issue should not be viewed solely as establishing new spheres

3 The interview was conducted by the author on June 23, 2016, at the Senate building in Paris.

4 The interview was conducted by the author on June 16, 2016, at the Senator building in Paris.

of influence in another country's jurisdiction. As Laguerre (2013) also states, by extending its national representation system beyond national borders, France is promoting global democratization and participation, setting an example for other nations in this context.

Italy

Interest among Italians abroad in homeland political developments predates the formal establishment of the diaspora electoral system. Proposals to grant expatriates voting and representation rights emerged as early as the post–World War I period, notably advanced by the MSI (Italian Social Movement), but were initially opposed—especially by left-wing parties—due to concerns over partisan advantage. Over time, as political opposition softened, these proposals gained broader acceptance, culminating in the adoption of a law in 2001, which granted Italians abroad the right to elect representatives to both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (Arcioni, 2006).

Italians living abroad are generally well organized, particularly in industrial areas with large Italian populations and around Catholic institutions (Laguerre, Parliament and Diaspora in Europe, 2013). In addition to informal networks, formal party organizations operate as overseas extensions of Italian political parties. Moreover, a legally established body—the General Council of Italians Abroad—coordinates diaspora representation by organizing expatriates into regional groups, each of which elects representatives to address local concerns such as education, employment, and community life, as well as issues of discrimination in host countries. These structures facilitate close interaction between diaspora communities and elected deputies and senators, strengthening channels of representation and communication.

Regulations governing the political rights of Italians abroad date back to 1985, with the current framework established through a 2001 constitutional amendment (Laguerre, 2013). This legislation created four overseas electoral districts—Europe (including Russia and Turkey), South America, North and Central America, and the rest of the world—and allocated a total of 12 deputies and 4 senators to represent Italians abroad. Each district is guaranteed at least one deputy and one senator, ensuring minimum representation across all regions.

Election campaigning

In Italy, candidates seeking to campaign abroad must obtain authorization from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which also oversees campaign spending and monitors financial contributions. To qualify as diaspora representatives, candidates must

be Italian citizens and maintain permanent residence abroad, a requirement that continues even after election. In addition, they must meet the legal criteria for parliamentary or senatorial candidacy, which are verified by relevant institutions.

Political parties consider candidates' ideological alignment, public profile, and local connections when selecting nominees, aiming to maximize electoral support within diaspora communities. Campaign activities abroad are subject to approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and local consulates to ensure compliance with host-country sensitivities. For instance, candidates campaigning in Canada must also secure permission from Canadian authorities, with campaign locations and activities coordinated in consultation with diplomatic representatives.

There are also diaspora electoral districts where candidates' election campaigns are not as difficult to conduct as in Canada. In countries where the use of venues suitable for the intensive participation of immigrant groups, such as churches and schools, and other public spaces is unrestricted during the election campaign process, candidates can communicate more easily with their voters. Claudio Micheloni[5], a senator elected from Switzerland, stated that election campaigns in Europe are relatively easier than in other regions. Micheloni said that he was able to conduct his election campaign more openly and visibly in Switzerland. The senator stated that although he could not hold a rally attended by thousands of people in an open area such as a park, he could easily run his campaign in places where people could easily gather, such as restaurants, and through media outlets such as radio and television.

On the matter of spending campaign money in foreign territories, Fabio Porta[6], a member of the Chamber of Deputies elected from Brazil, emphasized that the election expenses of representatives are no different from those of other representatives. Porta:

> Travel expenses are covered when other representatives are also present in the field. In this context, our travel expenses are also covered. The only difference is that we have to travel much longer distances to reach our electoral districts.

The maximum amount a representative can spend on election activities is regulated by law, not only the amount but also the manners and the permitted items of expenditure. The law regulates the upper limit of election expenses and the items of expenditure related to the election, regardless of whether the representative

5 The interview was conducted by the author in Rome on May 18, 2016.

6 The interview was conducted by the author in Rome on May 20, 2016.

candidate's constituency is domestic or overseas.

The agenda for candidates' elections in the diaspora constituency differs from that for candidates whose constituency is in their homeland. According to Senator Micheloni, the issues facing Italians living abroad are clearly education in their native language, passport and consular affairs, taxation, and social security and pensions. According to the senator, Italian citizens living abroad express their most fundamental desire as "being treated the same as Italian citizens living in Italy." Senator Micheloni adds that there is still a long way to go in this regard.

Taxation and representation

Under Italian law, citizens residing abroad are not subject to taxation unless they own income-generating assets or businesses within Italy, in order to avoid double taxation. However, critics—particularly from political groups historically opposed to diaspora representation—argue that individuals who do not contribute fiscally should not influence national decision-making. This debate intensified following the 2006 elections, when diaspora votes played a decisive role in shifting political power, a development viewed as controversial by some political actors. In response, proponents of the system reject the taxation-based argument, emphasizing instead the primacy of citizenship. As Representative Porta argues, political representation is a constitutional right that applies to all citizens regardless of their place of residence, making geographical location less relevant than formal membership in the political community:

We do not know whether an Italian living in the US today will decide to return to his country tomorrow. His living there does not prevent him from thinking about issues concerning his country and contributing to their solution.

Senator Micheloni shares a similar view with Porta on this issue. Micheloni even believes that the money sent by Italians living abroad to their relatives back home should be considered a kind of *voluntary tax*. Micheloni states that people do not go abroad for pleasure, but because life in Italy has become difficult, adding, "If things were going well, they would never have emigrated from Italy". The senator also argues that political representation for citizens living abroad would help maintain their ties to Italy. For this reason, he does not agree with the idea that representation should be tax-free.

The ability of political parties to secure diaspora representation in Italy depends largely on their level of support among expatriate voters. Although right-wing coalitions are often assumed to be dominant within the diaspora, the 2006 parliamentary elections

challenged this expectation. In that election, the results within Italy were highly contested, with Silvio Berlusconi's center-right coalition holding a narrow lead in the Senate, while Romano Prodi's opposition coalition had a slight advantage in the Chamber of Deputies. However, votes from abroad proved decisive, granting Prodi an additional four seats in the Senate and enabling his Union coalition to form the government. This outcome demonstrates the significant impact that diaspora votes can have on domestic political outcomes. While diaspora representatives generally view this system positively, it remains contested among domestic political actors, particularly in relation to issues such as tax-free representation and the influence of overseas voters on national politics.

Portugal

Portugal is among the early adopters of diaspora voting and representation rights. Following the 1974 Carnation Revolution, the 1976 Constitution granted equal political rights to Portuguese citizens regardless of residence, allowing those abroad to vote and be represented in parliament. Subsequent constitutional amendments expanded these rights to include presidential, referendum, and European Parliament elections. The electoral system consists of twenty-two constituencies, including two overseas districts—Europe and non-Europe—which together elect four deputies. Although there have been ongoing discussions about increasing this representation, no changes have been implemented to date.

Representation of the diaspora and the right to vote

Portugal's transition to democracy following the Carnation Revolution led to the reorganization of political rights, granting equal voting and representation rights to all citizens, including those living abroad. This broad consensus has been attributed both to the normative commitment to equal participation in the new democratic order and to the economic contributions of the diaspora through remittances (Lisi M. , Belchior, Abrantes, and Azevedo, 2015). The Portuguese diaspora has generally maintained strong ties with the homeland and has regarded political participation as a constitutional entitlement. However, despite this inclusive framework, representation remains limited in practice. The allocation of only two overseas constituencies, each electing a small number of representatives, reflects concerns about overrepresentation of non-resident citizens relative to the domestic electorate (Lobo, 2007). This limitation also restricts opportunities for smaller parties to gain representation (Lisi et al., 2015).

From an administrative perspective, overseas voting presents significant financial

challenges. As one expert from the Ministry of Interior's election administration[7] noted, "Voting abroad is much more expensive. You have to send all the necessary documents to everyone who has registered to vote, but only 20% of them actually vote." Beyond postal expenses, additional costs arise from vote counting, staffing at consulates, and logistical coordination.

Election campaign

Portuguese law provides a detailed framework for electoral campaigning abroad, requiring that campaigns be conducted in a way that adequately informs voters, including through the mailing of campaign materials. Political parties may also obtain lists of registered overseas voters from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for campaign purposes. However, the state does not provide financial support for campaigns abroad, which creates significant disparities between parties. In practice, only major parties such as the Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD) have the resources to organize effective campaigns overseas, including the establishment of campaign offices in key diaspora centers. While all parties are legally permitted to open offices abroad and contact registered voters, smaller parties face considerable financial and logistical constraints. As noted by diaspora MP Carlos António Páscoa Gonçalves8, the PSD supports its candidates by opening offices in countries with large Portuguese communities, including the United States, Brazil, South Africa, Canada, Argentina, Uruguay, and Namibia. Despite these efforts, campaigning abroad remains challenging, particularly for less well-resourced parties. Reflecting on these difficulties, Deputy Gonçalves states:

> We run our overseas campaigns with our party organizations there. One major issue we face is that we cannot open bank accounts during the campaign. We make our expenditures in cash. This is because other countries are opposed to a foreign party opening accounts in their countries. Of course, we do not engage in any illegal activities during this process. The countries where we run our campaigns are countries that accept dual citizenship. Brazil is one of these countries. We can also run campaigns through associations established by Portuguese citizens. We go to cities where they are concentrated.

As these observations suggest, conducting election campaigns abroad presents significant logistical and financial challenges for candidates. Campaign activities are typically concentrated in areas with high voter density, where candidates rely on available communication channels and the support of party organizations. However,

7 The interview was conducted by the author on December 11, 2016, in Lisbon.
8 The interview was conducted by the author on December 12, 2016, in Lisbon.

not all political parties possess the necessary resources to operate abroad, and some are therefore limited to conducting campaigns through mail-based outreach. As Gonçalves notes, candidates often incur substantial personal expenses to sustain their electoral campaigns overseas.

Travel and election promise

As noted earlier, candidates do not receive public funding for their pre-election activities, and only major parties provide limited financial support for campaigning. As a result, travel remains a significant challenge for diaspora representatives both during and after elections. To address this issue, the Portuguese parliament has introduced a specific travel fund for representatives elected from overseas constituencies. Reflecting on this matter, Gonçalves states:

> It is important to maintain contact with voters after being elected, but visiting the entire region is difficult and expensive. In addition, there is parliamentary work to be done here. Unlike other representatives, we have permission to travel. Our party leader gives me permission in this regard. Furthermore, the president of the parliament also gives me official permission to visit my constituencies. If I don't get this permission, I will be considered absent. I travel to four continents. This requires non-stop work. In places I can't reach, I can communicate with voters via email and social media platforms such as Facebook. But most importantly, I must travel to my constituencies at least twice a year. …There is a budget allocated to us by parliament to cover travel expenses. We spend this budget easily. This budget is allocated solely for the use of diaspora representatives.

In terms of campaign agendas, parliamentary candidates tend to emphasize similar priorities. Central themes include addressing the challenges faced by diaspora communities, strengthening their cultural ties with the homeland, and supporting diaspora schools and other educational institutions. In addition, candidates focus on facilitating consular services and encouraging diaspora investment in Portugal. The protection of citizenship rights and the intergenerational transmission of the Portuguese language also feature prominently in their electoral platforms.

Taxation and political participation

One of the most debated issues in overseas political participation is the relationship between taxation and representation. Portugal adopts one of the most inclusive approaches on this matter. Since the Carnation Revolution, which marked the country's transition to democracy, there has been a broad consensus that all citizens—regardless of residence—should participate in the democratic process. This perspective remains influential among policymakers and within society. For instance, academics from

the University Institute of Lisbon[9] emphasized that the issue should not be assessed solely in terms of taxation, arguing that such a narrow view overlooks its historical and social dimensions. As one academic summarizes:

> Perhaps this issue should be evaluated in the context of identity rather than financial support. People who were forced to emigrate or who emigrated in some way had strong ties to Portugal and did not consider themselves separate from what was happening in their homeland. In other words, Portuguese people who emigrated, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, did not completely sever their ties with their country. Their social lives were still centered in Portugal. They had homes there. Therefore, we cannot say that they were completely untaxed representatives. It is also not right to link the right of those who do not live in the country to have a say in its future to taxation. This is a matter of citizenship. Once you have citizenship, you can come and settle in Portugal without having to please anyone. Therefore, in this case, the future of the country concerns everyone. Voting is also optional. If you are interested in the country, you can participate in the elections. If you have no interest in the country, you are not obliged to participate in the elections. It should also be remembered that there is no guarantee that emigration will continue indefinitely. For example, we see Portuguese people who emigrated to France returning to the country during their retirement. Therefore, it is difficult to say that emigrants' interest in the country will disappear forever.

While taxation and representation are generally treated as separate issues in Portugal, concerns persist regarding the electoral impact of diaspora voters. It is widely recognized that higher turnout among citizens abroad could influence national outcomes, as seen in closely contested elections between the Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD), where overseas votes have shifted the balance. At the same time, although overall political preferences of voters abroad do not significantly differ from those within Portugal, the success of the PSD has been partly attributed to its strong ties with diaspora communities and the conservative orientation of many immigrant associations The academic summarizes this relationship as follows:

> Although diaspora voters may give the impression that they hold right-wing conservative views based on their voting behavior, it is a fact that if the majority of immigrants in Europe were to vote, the election results would be similar to those in their homeland. Social dynamics in Europe show this, and the largest number of Portuguese live in Europe.

In summary, Portugal maintains a structured yet limited system of diaspora representation, with four members of parliament elected from two overseas

9 The interview was conducted by the author on December 12, 2016, in Lisbon.

constituencies—Europe and non-Europe—regardless of turnout levels. Although these representatives are elected from diaspora districts, they are constitutionally mandated to represent the nation as a whole. This model reflects a balance between inclusive citizenship and controlled representation. At the same time, debates over the adequacy of this system persist. As MP Gonçalves argues, increasing the number of diaspora representatives to six could provide more balanced coverage across Europe, Portuguese-speaking countries, and other regions. While such reforms face constitutional constraints, these discussions underscore the continued importance Portugal places on integrating its citizens abroad into national political life.

Conclusion

This study examines three countries with established overseas representation systems—France, Italy, and Portugal—through the perspectives of members of parliament, senators, bureaucrats, and academics. As one of the few fieldwork-based analyses in this area, it seeks to contribute to literature by offering empirically grounded insights into the practical functioning of extraterritorial parliamentary representation. A comparative perspective reveals both shared institutional features and important variations in how these systems operate across different national contexts. In doing so, the study demonstrates that extraterritorial parliamentary practices remain dynamic even in economically and democratically developed European states, where they have evolved into a recognizable model of governance. While their origins can be traced to colonial legacies and patterns of economic migration, these systems today reflect broader transformations toward transnational citizenship and extraterritorial governance.

At the same time, this study does not claim to provide a definitive account. There is a clear need for further research that expands the number of cases and deepens analytical engagement, particularly by incorporating the perspectives of both diaspora representatives and domestic political actors. As such, the field of overseas representation warrants continued scholarly attention across both established and emerging democracies.

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