

The Implementation of Voting from Abroad: Evidence from the 2014 Turkish Presidential Election

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ABSTRACT

Voting from abroad (VFA) is a complex norm and practice due to the multilevel processes, structures and actors involved. This article explores the reasons behind the eventual adoption of this practice within the context of a long and well-known history of emigration in Turkey. During the 2014 Turkish presidential election, emigrants from Turkey were finally allowed to participate from abroad even though legislation giving them this right has been in place since 1995. Based on archival research and fieldwork in Germany and the United States, this article discusses the varying relevance of three central explanatory factors to the implementation of VFA: emigrant lobbying, the electoral expectations of potential benefit by the governing party, and the presence of broader, state-led diaspora engagement policies. The first of these is important but insufficient, whereas the second factor is necessary. Moreover, the presence of broader, state-led diaspora engagement policies is a mediating factor. This article finds that specific actors like political parties may play the crucial role, highlighting the need for critical examination of their role in the implementation process.

INTRODUCTION

Research into migration, diasporas, and transnational communities shows that citizenship goes beyond being a purely territorialized relationship (Collyer, 2013: 301). Although the traditional membership and citizenship approach focuses on host state membership, treating it as unique and exclusive, many home states grant citizenship status as well as rights and duties to “external citizens who are temporarily or permanently outside of the territory of a polity that recognizes them as members” (Bauböck, 2009: 478).

Voting from abroad (VFA), also known as voting abroad, out-of-country voting, external franchise, external voting and diaspora/migrant voting, can be defined as legislation by which citizens residing abroad are given rights to vote in their home country elections. Recently, it has become an international norm as well as a set of practices (Boccagni, Lafleur, Levitt, 2015: 13). More than 115 countries have allowed VFA for nationals within the past two decades. The number could now be substantially higher with additions, such as Egypt in 2011 and Libya in 2012.

Studies show that there were different stages in the adoption and implementation of VFA. Some countries like Angola, Bolivia, Greece, and Nicaragua have introduced provisions for VFA, but have not yet fully implemented them. Some other countries, such as India, Israel, Zimbabwe, and

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Malta allow diaspora members to vote only if they are physically present in their home countries when elections occur (Bowden 2013:1; Turcu, 2015:3). Morocco (1993), Armenia (2007) and the Cook Islands (2003) cancelled VFA after it had been implemented for at least one election (Turcu, 2015:5).

There is an emerging literature on the theoretical understanding of VFA (for example Bauböck, 2007), its relationship with citizenship debates (Fitzgerald, 2006), as well as its meanings and effects (Boccagni, 2011). However, except for the studies of Rhodes and Harutyunyan (2010) and Turcu (2015), empirical research still seems to be lagging behind, particularly studies that question the actual timing of implementation. This article responds to this gap by focusing on the factors that influence the implementation of voting abroad as well as the actors who pushed for its realization in the case of Turkey.

Turkey, as a major sending country in the Western European immigration landscape since the late 1960s, can be regarded as a significant case in terms of VFA. It has five million citizens living abroad, almost four million of whom live in European countries. Many emigrants hold Turkish citizenship, making them prospective out-of-country voters. According to the 2014 official records, there are 52,692,841 registered voters in Turkey and 2,789,726 voters residing abroad, constituting five percent of all voters (Election Results, 2014). The country has allowed citizens living abroad to vote since 1995, but they were not able to participate in Turkish elections from abroad until 2014. Before 2014, they were only able to participate by returning to Turkey and voting at ballot boxes set up in customs gates at airports and land borders across the country, but were not allowed to vote at regular polling stations in the country (Election Law, Article 94/E, 2008).

During the 2014 presidential election, voters were allowed to cast their votes in person at designated polling stations in their countries of residence for the first time. The leader and presidential candidate of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who had been the prime minister since 2003, received 65.52 percent of the external votes, which was higher than his in-country vote percentage (51 percent), becoming Turkey's first, directly-elected president in the first round of competitive elections.

The case of Turkey is meaningful and significant from a comparative perspective. There has been a gap between the long and well-known history of emigration and the far more recent and contingent history of political engagement in the form of VFA. Such is the case in Mexico, which failed to implement VFA for decades due to the two, interrelated issues. First, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, which had been in power for 71 years, was afraid to grant the right to migrants, believing that they would vote against it. Second, citizens abroad were disinterested in the idea of voting because they thought elections were open to fraud and were merely rituals (Lafleur 2011, Smith 2008).

Even though Mexico's and Turkey's experiences of VFA appear very similar at first, the question of why Turkey finally enabled emigrants to vote abroad in 2014 after almost 50 years of emigration history and decades after that legislation had been passed begs an explanation. This article examines the relevance of three factors: emigrant lobbying, the electoral expectations of potential benefit by the governing party, and the presence of broader, state-led diaspora engagement policies. It examines each variable's degree of influence and identifies mechanisms in which these variables contribute to the implementation of VFA. Before moving on to the discussion, we will review the relevant literature and will introduce the study's methodology.

DRIVING FORCES FOR INTRODUCTION OF VFA

Given the dramatic increase in the expansion of VFA practices worldwide, scholarship on the topic has increased in the last decade. Scholars have questioned why and when states expand voting

rights beyond their territories, and have attempted to explain specific arrangements that are chosen to administer voting abroad (for example Collyer, 2013).

Two closely related general explanations are diaspora engagement policies and economic interests regarding emigrants' remittances. First, VFA emerges as a manifestation of home states' growing interest in maintaining strong connections with their citizens abroad and in forging loyalty and attachment. Second, home states seek to ensure the continuing flow of remittances and to draw resources from emigrants via development projects. As Lafleur (2011) notes, allowing VFA is a part of broader diaspora engagement policies, which states may develop chiefly to benefit from emigrants as a resource.

A growing body of literature has identified more nuanced variables (Bauböck, 2009; Brand, 2013; Lafleur, 2011; Smith, 2008; Varadarajan, 2010), including normative democratic motives, norm diffusion, ethnic/religious nationalism, decentralization, new competitive electoral contexts, political parties' strategic/pragmatic interests, and emigrant lobbying. The combination of these variables shapes the timing, nature, and implementation of VFA, and the influence of each individual variable differs according to regime type as well as the evolution of domestic politics.

In the case of democratic countries, expanding voting rights is a way of providing full rights to nationals abroad, reflecting a belief in the democratic principles of universal suffrage and equal participation. It serves to make democracies more participatory, inclusive, legitimate, and trustworthy, because territorial and membership boundaries circumscribe democratic citizenship, while VFA may enhance it (Bauböck, 2005). However, its contribution to democracy has been found controversial on the basis of the territoriality of citizenship rights as well as concerns about electoral transparency and the political impact of external votes vis-à-vis in-country votes.

Countries in democratic transition have also introduced VFA to restore political rights and enhance inclusivity. As observed in Spain, Portugal, and several Latin American countries, it seemed natural to reward expatriates by granting them full political participation with democratic participation itself having to be newly defined (Bauböck, 2005). A number of factors push these countries to introduce such policies, ranging from a desire to make amends for past human rights abuses to maintaining ties with political exiles and mobilizing human resources to consolidating power and drawing on financial resources. The policies are parallel to the depth of the transitions in each country when political boundaries are redrawn.

VFA has also become common in authoritarian political systems like those that have historically existed in Indonesia, Colombia, and currently in North African states. Brand finds that "while the language of citizenship has generally been appropriated as a part of extending VFA, the rationale behind it in authoritarian settings has origins in a range of elite concerns, from formal legitimation to security and monitoring of expatriate communities" (2010:3). Ethnic nationalism could also be a motivating factor, because granting voting rights is considered a means to integrate the dispersed 'nation' into the homeland.

The introduction of VFA may also be the outcome of increasing emigrant demands and lobbying. Emigrants make claims through civil society activities within their country of origin or from their communities abroad, as is the case for Mexico, Botswana, and the Philippines, and may succeed in pushing home countries to initiate VFA. Emigrants expect to become involved in the key, historical junctures of home states, and perceive voting as an appropriate means of doing so (Brand, 2013:2).

The aforementioned factors seem to play a key role in putting VFA on the political agenda in home countries. However, there has been little discussion about how much the same factors play a role in its practical implementation. Here, the interests and concerns of political institutions, such as parties, electoral authorities, and consular services, should be taken into account. As Lafleur (2011: 497) argues in his comparative study of Mexico, Italy and Belgium, the interests of domestic actors, particularly political parties and their perceptions of the impact of VFA, may play a crucial role. Parties may conceive enfranchising expatriates as particularly important "when expatriates constitute more than a negligible percentage of the population" and "when there is a common belief

that emigrants will support a certain political party more often than their competitors” (Brand, 2010:84). For example, conservative parties in the UK in the 1980s and Austria in the 1990s introduced absentee ballots with the expectation that expatriates would vote for them. Similarly, measures in Honduras were enacted by a party that saw political advantage in doing so (Ellis, 2007). Even if parties do not expect to get votes, as is the case in Italy, they may eventually agree to pass legislation, because they believe that “the impact of the emigrant vote on the overall result would be somewhat predictable, limited, and/or compensated for” (Lafleur, 2011: 498).

Turkey is a valuable case study through which to revisit these explanations presented in the literature, for the following reasons: 1) Turkey is in the process of democratic consolidation; 2) it has a long history of emigration but has previously launched limited and selective diaspora engagement policies; 3) emigrants have been politically engaged with homeland politics and have demanded voting rights since the 1970s; and 4) recently, the governing party – the AKP – has paid increasing attention to citizens abroad and has introduced several, new diaspora engagement policies. Given this background, and drawing on insights from the relevant literature, we constructed three hypotheses that apply to the implementation of VFA in the Turkish case.

The first relates to emigrant lobbying. Migrants from Turkey have long been active in making demands and lobbying for VFA. We hypothesize that this might have contributed to the Turkish state’s decision to implement VFA in 2014, as the state sought to meet these demands.

Our second hypothesis centres on the argument that the implementation of VFA reflects the aim of home states to maintain ties with and cultivate loyalty among citizens and co-ethnics abroad. We suggest that the Turkish state might have made VFA possible in order to vary and strengthen its diaspora engagement policies.

The third hypothesis is based on political party perceptions of the impact of VFA. The number of external voters in the Turkish case is relatively high, and survey results have demonstrated that the governing party – the AKP – has an electoral advantage abroad. We hypothesize that the AKP might have utilized VFA in an attempt to secure a majority vote for its presidential candidate.

Other factors that might be drawn from the literature include: the goals of securing remittance flows, providing more inclusive citizenship, building a more open political system, and norm diffusion. However, we argue that these are not central to the present case. First, emigrants’ remittances no longer constitute a significant source of income for the Turkish economy. While the share of remittances in Turkey’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was three percent in 1980, this share dropped to 0.01 percent in 2010 (Sayarı and Tekin-Koru, 2012:156; World Bank, 2011). Thus, voting provisions would not be utilized in order to secure remittances. Second, it could be argued that if inclusive citizenship and meaningful political participation were significant, then the state would have attempted to accord emigrants the right to parliamentary seats, which has been done in similar cases. Third, close examination of government documents and speeches provides no evidence of norm diffusion being influential or of any possible pressure from the international community, specifically from the European Union (EU). Furthermore, there is little evidence that Turkey imitated other sending countries in adopting its VFA legislation.

In terms of methodology, we examined the debates on VFA legislation that have taken place since the 1970s, the content of diaspora engagement policies, and developments regarding VFA implementation in the past decade, to test our hypotheses. Our main data are drawn from a large-scale, qualitative analysis of documents, including scientific literature, legal procedures, press reports, political party papers, and journalistic accounts. The minutes of parliamentary debates were an important source of information, providing insights into how governments framed VFA and how various opposition parties reacted. To gain a more nuanced understanding of VFA adoption, particularly regarding the investigation of the roles of different actors, the authors also conducted field work in two host countries: Germany and the United States. Germany is an established destination for emigrants from Turkey and hosts almost half of the eligible Turkish voters abroad. The USA is a more recent destination country and hosts a considerable number of well-educated, Turk-

ish migrants. A total of 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of emigrant associations, ambassadors, civil servants, politicians, party activists, academicians, migration experts, journalists, and voters. These participants were selected to understand how the research question – the reasons behind the implementation of VFA in 2014 – is reflected upon and responded to differently by various stakeholders and related parties. All had emigrant backgrounds from Turkey. Fifteen interviews were conducted in different cities in Germany, while ten were conducted in Washington DC. The interviews were crucial in tracing the steps towards VFA, given the fact that little data is readily available on the political behaviour of emigrants from Turkey. Data were also drawn from participatory observations conducted during the actual voting process in Düsseldorf, which is the most crowded election district abroad, and Washington DC between July 31 and August 4, 2014. Additional data were collected from newspapers published in Germany, the USA and Turkey between May 20 and August 20, 2014 as well as websites, online civil society forums related to elections, and TV programmes targeting citizens abroad.

The following section introduces the electoral system and domestic politics of Turkey since the mid-1980s and the characteristics of emigrants and their relationship with the parties. Then, in order to understand the role of emigrant lobbying, party electoral expectations, and state-led diaspora engagement policies in this process, it traces the process leading up to the introduction of VFA.

EMIGRANT LOBBYING AND VFA INTRODUCTION

Turkey has a fragmented, multi-party regime, using a system of proportional representation based on administrative provinces as constituencies to elect 550 members of parliament for a five-year duration. Parties have been required to exceed a 10 percent electoral threshold to gain seats in parliament since 1983. Small parties often evade the threshold either by trying to form alliances with other parties or by running their candidates as nominal independents (Hale, 2008: 233).

Turkey's fragmented party system led to intense governmental instability and a succession of weak coalition governments beginning in the 1960s. Politics under the leadership of the right-wing Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP) maintained a majority in the government from 1983 until 1991. By the 1990s, the following parties were represented in parliament: CHP (Republican People's Party) DSP (Democratic Left Party), MHP (Nationalist Action Party), ANAP, DYP (True Path Party), RP (Welfare Party), succeeded by SP (Felicity Party), and DEP (Democracy Party), succeeded by HADEP, (People's Democracy Party). Groups of these parties formed seven, short-lived coalition governments between 1993 and 2002. By the 2000s, Turkish domestic politics became more stable, because only two parties, the AKP and CHP, passed the electoral threshold, with the former being able to form a single party government in 2002. The 2007 election led to three parties being represented in the parliament, AKP, CHP, and MHP, while the Kurdish nationalist-oriented Democratic Society Party (DTP) gained 22 seats by running as independent candidates. The 2011 election led to the same parties (AKP, CHP, MHP) and independent candidates from the Kurdish party sharing parliamentary seats and to AKP remaining the governing party. Not only the structure of Turkish party system but also the composition of emigrants is important for VFA.

Emigrants originating from Turkey are heterogeneous, consisting of different ethnic and religious groups, including mainly Turks, Kurds, Armenians, and Alevites, who have constructed separate diasporic communities. Most of them descend from the first generation of guest workers who left in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of them are asylum seekers who escaped during the 1980s military coup and the Kurdish conflict during the 1990s. The number of labour migrants and refugees increased with family reunification. Germany is an important host country, because of the large

number of migrants from Turkey. Almost 3 million emigrants reside in Germany, and 1,383,040 of them have Turkish citizenship and are eligible voters, making them more than half of external voters (2.5 million). Turkish citizens abroad are dispersed in many countries with France (450,000), the Netherlands (372,000), and the USA (250,000) placed as the three, largest hosting countries after Germany.

Turkish political parties are forbidden to organize election campaigns abroad (Election Law, Article 94/A, 2008). As Ostergaard-Nielsen explained “most parties have worked abroad since the 1970s through an intricate transnational network of ‘informal contacts’ between political actors in the homeland and various Turkish or Kurdish associations abroad along party – political, ethnic, and religious – lines (2003, 88). Although there is no survey study on the voting patterns of citizens abroad, it seems that the voting preferences of each group are similar to those of the same group in Turkey. Nevertheless, it is rumoured that before 2014, citizens who travelled to Turkey to vote at the ballot boxes set up at airports were often the supporters of religious or nationalist parties (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003: 89).

Against this backdrop, one of the earliest official records of the demand for VFA in Turkey is a parliamentary proposal called Workers Abroad and Problems, dated December 1, 1971. We hypothesize that the Turkish state introduced and implemented VFA in order to meet emigrants’ long-term demands for political participation and representation in homeland politics. The long-term nature of emigrants’ demands for VFA was emphasized by one interviewee, a freelance journalist who has lived in Germany for the past three decades:

Emigrants’ demand for voting abroad is not something new. Citizens asked for this right whenever a Turkish politician came to Germany since 1971. Politicians were promising that we would be able to vote in the next election, but it did not happen [we were not allowed].

During an interview on July 29, 2014, one Turkish-German, elected Green Party representative living in Cologne stated that:

Since the early 1980s, immigrants demand[ed] this right. They gave dossiers to politicians who came here from Turkey. I myself gave [out] at least 15 dossiers explaining the importance of VFA for emigrants.

Emigrant associations continued to voice this demand in the 1980s. Various parties promised to address the demands, but the Turkish authorities failed to take any action until 1987 when an amendment to the electoral law was made allowing citizens abroad to vote at ballot boxes at airports and borders. Approximately 50,000 citizens abroad casted their votes in 1987 and 1991 (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003:87).

By the 1990s, several politicians had placed VFA on the political agenda. State minister, Ayvaz Gökdemir, prepared a report in 1995 and proposed to the Turkish parliament that “our citizens abroad should be allowed to vote in Turkey’s election from abroad” (Kılıçaslan, 1995:1). Following this, on July 23, 1995, the first provision for VFA was introduced with a constitutional amendment approved by the DYP and SHP coalition government that led between June 1993 and October 1995 (Art. 4121, 1995). In principle, this amendment granted Turkish citizens abroad the right to vote in general elections and referenda. However, it required additional electoral legislation provisions in order to determine applicable measures for implementation. Although public discussions, particularly sparked by emigrant associations, continued about the importance of voting abroad and possible applicable measures, neither parties nor coalition governments put the issue at the centre of their agendas due to domestic issues.

After the AKP became the single, ruling party in 2002, emigrant representatives started to voice the VFA demand again when they met AKP’s elected representatives abroad (Parliamentary Minutes1, 2008). These emigrants argued that even small countries that were less powerful than Tur-

key, like Iraq, had given this right to their citizens abroad (Interviewee 1, 2014). This time the request for VFA was being reframed in a way that was consistent with the government's priority of Turkey being a "strong country".

The AKP put the issue of VFA on the parliament's agenda in February 2008, along with several other changes to the Electoral Law. Limited parliamentary discussions during the process of enacting these changes provide insights into the political parties' stances. Similar to the way emigrants promoted VFA, AKP representatives also used the discourse that Turkey, as a "strong country", should implement VFA during parliamentary discussions. One elected representative, Necati Çetinkaya, stated that:

Turkey is a big country and has a strong state. However, we (as a state) were not able to grant voting rights to our emigrants. Why? We had prepared some draft laws as in 1987, proposed the law in the Parliament, but there were some obstacles. In fact, we wanted to grant this right. The authorities of host countries rejected our demand on the basis of security [...] they pretended that voting caused some public security problems there (Parliamentary minutes1, 2008).

The AKP presented the proposal as an implementation of constitutional rights (referring to the 1995 constitutional article), as a way of increasing democratic participation and consolidating democracy, and of acknowledging emigrants' contributions to Turkey's economic development since 1961 (Parliamentary Minutes2, 2008). Although opposition parties agreed with the government on these points, they implied that the AKP's initiative was a strategic manoeuvre to increase its votes. During parliamentary discussions, members of opposition parties, such as elected representative Faruk Bal from the nationalist, right-wing MHP, claimed that the governing party often changed electoral law according to its own interests just before elections. He argued that if the government were sincere, it should grant representation rights to emigrants (Parliamentary Minutes3, 2008). Another elected representative, Şerafettin Halis from the left-wing, Kurdish, Peace and Democracy Party, criticized the law on the basis that it neither allowed emigrants to vote in local elections nor did it permit emigrants to vote for independent candidates, which he proposed should be allowed in order to be "fair and democratic" (Parliamentary Minutes4, 2008). The opposition parties all expressed worries about the reliability of the electoral process. Nevertheless, they approved the legislative change in 2008 in order to avoid being seen as openly opposing VFA.

In the end, five new articles on 'voting methods and general principles of voters abroad' were added to the Election Law. These stated that the Supreme Board of Elections, the main electoral body consulting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should decide whether voting at ballot boxes, at customs, by mail or online would be used, according to the conditions of the host country. Voters abroad could vote in general elections, presidential elections and referenda (Election Law Art.94/A, 2008). However, the Constitutional Court annulled the postal voting option after an application by the main opposition party, the CHP, which claimed that postal voting contradicted the principles of secrecy and independence in elections and was against the Turkish Constitution (Election Law Art.298, 2008). Of the other options, online voting was found to be too complex. Two options, voting at customs points and on diplomatic mission grounds, remained, and the necessary regulations were made in May 2012.

In interviews, we heard differing accounts of the reason for the delay between 1995 and 2014. One bureaucrat we interviewed accused the German authorities of not previously allowing the implementation to proceed (Interview 4, 2014). Similarly, Mehmet Necati Çetinkaya, an AKP's elected representative (2007–2011), stated that Germany did not permit ballot boxes to be set up because of "public security concerns". Once the German interior ministry gave its approval in 2007, "then our Prime Minister took action" (Parliamentary minutes1, 2008). However, a journalist in Germany and a Turkish-German politician both contradicted this argument. For them, the delay

resulted from Turkey's lack of capacity to administer elections abroad (Interviewee 2, Interviewee 3, 2014).

It is possible to conclude that civil society efforts did contribute to the introduction of voting abroad. Emigrant associations have consistently requested voting rights since the 1970s. Many of these organizations have organic ties with Turkish political parties, which also have an elected representative responsible for organizing political activities abroad. Demands were voiced through these elected representatives or through other deputies visiting host countries. The associations affiliated with the governing party also voiced their demands at the state ministry level or via commissions established to look after citizens abroad. In turn, political parties promised to take action. Nevertheless, VFA was neither at the top of many independent associations' agendas nor on the political parties' agendas. Moreover, government parties might have taken the emigrant population's heterogeneity and its electoral consequences into consideration. One politician interviewee noted that parties in power (often centre-right parties) might have been concerned that the votes would go to leftist and Kurdish parties, considering the high number of political refugees who emigrated from Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s (Interview 3, 2014).

Civil society efforts can, thus, be seen to have had an impact on the early stages of VFA, particularly in putting it on the agenda of political parties, but not on its full implementation. We suggest that had there been greater political will and commitment, it is possible that implementation could have occurred earlier.

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT POLICIES

The AKP government (2002–2015) attempted to develop concerted diaspora engagement policies, labelling migrants and co-ethnics abroad as a diaspora and embracing transnationalism despite a long-term lack of coordinated policies (Aksel, 2014; Bilgili and Siegel, 2014; Öktem, 2014). The government sought ways in which to keep nationals abroad (and former nationals) close to Turkey and Turkish culture. It paid increased attention to emigrants, improved the service of diplomatic missions, developed fellowship programmes for emigrants' children, increased the number of cultural and language centres abroad, and created a public institution called the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Kin Communities (PTAKC) in 2010 to function as a reference point for emigrant-related affairs. This new government initiative was advocated by the advisors of then prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2003–2014), founded under the Prime Ministry, and generously supported in terms of its budget and cadre (Oktem, 2014:7). PTAKC was established with the motto of “wherever we have kin, we [the Turkish state] are there”. PTAKC became responsible for building social, cultural, and economic relations not only with (former) citizens abroad but also with kin and co-ethnic communities as well as foreign students in Turkey. In terms of emigrant affairs, it involves meeting the practical needs of emigrants that arise during their visits to Turkey, along with dealing with issues like religious services, dual citizenship, pension related issues, employment, and political rights. Such a new national-level institution reflects the institutional crystallization of Turkey's growing interest in engagement with citizens abroad as well as how the government policy turned into state policy.

Throughout the AKP's years in power, redefining its relationship with migrants from Turkey has been in accordance with both domestic and foreign policy interests. In the first half of the 2000s, this was partly because of the Turkish government's interest in joining the EU and in improving its international image. It needed to win support and encourage active lobbying in host countries. Subsequently, the Turkish government's desire to be a “leading and central country in its region” and “pivotal country in the world”¹ made it reconsider its relationship with its citizens abroad. The official state discourse centres on being an emerging power and a strong/capable country both within

and beyond Turkey's geographic borders. The state's interest in citizens abroad and kin communities is part of this image with the state claiming that Turkey can protect its citizens and co-ethnics wherever they live. Inspired by Ottomanism and Turkish nationalism, Turkish politicians seem to believe that this protection discourse might help build a strong country image in and outside of Turkey as well as help bolster its international standing. Its increasing attention to emigrants is closely related to the historical power asymmetry particularly between Germany and Turkey. Germany used to determine how far Turkey could be involved in issues related to Turkish citizens abroad, such as issues of dual citizenship. However, during the AKP period, Turkey found an opportunity to challenge this inequality and redefine bilateral relations thanks to its economic development and political reforms.

The link between the aspiration to be a strong country and diaspora engagement policies can be traced to the public speeches of AKP's prominent politicians: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was the architect of Turkish foreign policy during the era of AKP governments, as he served as chief advisor to the prime minister (2003–2009), as foreign minister (2009–2014), and then as prime minister (2014–2015). Both of them have been the most influential figures in shaping Turkey's foreign and diaspora engagement policies during the AKP era.

In addressing migrants' representatives on June 16, 2013, Prime Minister Erdoğan said:

Today, Turkey reached the situation of being powerful, ambitious, having high goals. Turkey sets the agenda, instead of its agenda being set by others. Turkey should be taken into account in considering world affairs ... A powerful country protects her citizens abroad, kin communities and brothers (Altınok, 2013:7).

On a similar note, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu noted:

Turkey is a strong country that deals with not only domestic problems but also world problems. Protecting the rights of citizens abroad is the dignity of the Turkish Republic. If a state is not able to protect the rights of citizens abroad, its sovereignty claims within borders will be weakened. Sovereignty means protecting and helping your citizens abroad ... The Turkish Republic has the power to protect her citizens' wherever they live. This ancient nation will respond to the call of its kin and relatives about every issue everywhere ... Turkey broke the chain that slowed it down, no one can hinder Turkey's growing self confidence (Davutoğlu, 2013).

In relation to the aforementioned objectives and diaspora engagement policies, VFA is considered a concrete way of showing Turkey's commitment to maintaining ties with citizens abroad, making them an integral and welcome component of the national community, as well as demonstrating Turkey's capacity to become a strong country. Evidence found in parliamentary discussions and official publications supports this argument. For instance, the AKP's elected representative Necati Cetinkaya emphasized the strong country discourse by stating that "as a big country, the Turkish republic is a powerful state, how have we not yet given the voting right to our citizens abroad?" (Parliamentary Speech1, 2008). However, although VFA fits within the broader context of diaspora engagement policies, implementation would not have materialized without the political will and motivation of the governing party.

AKP'S ELECTORAL EXPECTATIONS AND THE TIMING OF IMPLEMENTATION

The 2014 presidential election took place in an environment dominated by the AKP, which has held a majority in the parliament since 2002 and in local governments since 2004. The main opposition parties, CHP and MHP, aspired to broaden their vote share to be able to end the AKP's

majority. The Kurdish nationalist-oriented successor parties DTP and BDP secured 22 and 36 parliamentary seats in the 2007 and 2011 general elections with independent candidates, respectively.

The AKP succeeded in referenda held in 2007 and 2011, and attempted to achieve democratic transition with the influence of the EU bid, along with political and institutional reforms launched mainly to curb the traditional power of the military over politics. It sought to guarantee fundamental rights and to improve minority rights, mainly Kurdish group rights. A constitutional referendum in 2007 changed the indirect presidential election system into a direct election of the president by popular vote, requiring an absolute majority of valid votes. However, the AKP slowed down its reform and implementation processes after its 2011 general election victory. Starting in May 2013, the government confronted dissenters, starting with the nation-wide, anti-government demonstrations known as the Gezi Movement, and widely used violence and coercion against them. A two-year process to draft a new civil constitution officially stalled in October 2013. Nevertheless, the AKP was successful in the local elections held in March 2014. Erdoğan and the AKP approached the presidential election as a referendum for the introduction of a presidential system. For opposition parties, the election was critical for being able to stop the slide towards single party authoritarianism under the AKP and the presidential system. As expected, the AKP nominated Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been popular among emigrants in European countries, as the presidential candidate. The CHP and MHP nominated a joint candidate, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, while the Kurdish party, the HDP, placed Selahattin Demirtaş as its candidate.

The 2014 presidential election was expected to be very competitive. The percentage of votes at customs points received by the AKP in the previous election was around 65 per cent, giving the AKP a reason to view these voters as an opportunity.² Relying on public opinion surveys, Erdoğan was expected to receive almost 60–70 per cent of emigrants' support.

Other evidence also confirms the presence of decisive political commitment to implementation of voting abroad in 2014. The view that Turkey rushed towards implementation is widely shared by migrant associations, citizens, and even some interviewed bureaucrats (Interview 5, 2014). Turkish media reported that some procedures were unclear and incomplete in the election regulations abroad. There were serious concerns about electoral integrity, particularly ballot secrecy and transparency. Furthermore, due to the limited preparation time, election management administrators faced difficulties in providing timely and sufficient information about voter registration procedures and the conditions that applied.

Despite the lack of timely preparation, ballot boxes were placed in 54 countries, which each had more than 500 Turkish citizens in residence. Only 530,116 out of 2,798,726 registered voters cast votes from abroad and at customs points, which is a 19 per cent turnout. Similar to other examples like the Colombian national election in 1991 and the Mexican presidential election in 2006, Turkey's experience of VFA ended with an unexpectedly low turnout.

The distribution of out-of-country votes was as follows: 329,317 overseas voters voted for Tayyip Erdoğan (63%), 153,513 (29%) voted for Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, and 43,689 (8.5%) voted for Selahattin Demirtaş. 85 per cent of registered voters abroad reside in eleven Western European countries, and 67 per cent of their votes were cast for Erdoğan. In many hosting countries, Erdoğan took more votes than his opponents with the exceptions of the USA, Canada, and the UK, where İhsanoğlu received 77 per cent, 51 per cent, and 50 per cent of the votes respectively. Nevertheless, the number of votes in these three countries constituted a very small portion of the overall votes (6%). The Kurdish party candidate did not secure the majority vote in any hosting country with the highest numbers being recorded in Switzerland (28%), the UK (27%), and France (27%). Support remained at 7 per cent in Germany. Considering the number of Kurdish migrants/refugees living in European countries, the results were overall lower than those expected.

In general, the results confirmed the opinion polls and Erdoğan received 65.52 per cent of the external votes. Here, we can see a substantial gap between the shares of votes for Erdoğan among residents in Turkey (51%) and those voting abroad (65%). While the VFA rate was relatively (and

surprisingly) low, it did affect the electoral outcome. As anticipated, these votes were crucial to the result. Erdoğan secured the majority vote by a slight margin and was able to be elected president in the first round because of the 1.5 per cent of votes from abroad.

CONCLUSION

Turkey has a long emigrant history, but has only recently implemented VFA. By examining this case, this article has expanded and contributed to existing scholarship on VFA. The case demonstrated that there were different stages in the introduction of VFA, which started with raising the issue on the political agenda, supporting legalization, and then enabling implementation. These stages might have taken decades because of the varying interests and capabilities of actors involved in the process. This article addressed the central questions asked by VFA scholarship – why and when do states grant their emigrants the right to vote from abroad – but also pushes these questions further by asking under which conditions states are more likely to implement VFA in practice.

Recent work has found that although the language of democracy and citizenship has been appropriated in relation to extended voting, the rationale behind it originates in a range of concerns. A combination of variables shapes the development of VFA in different parts of the world. This article further argues that the impact of each factor varies according to the specific domestic context. In Turkey's case, it is found that civil society lobbying is a necessary factor, the expected electoral benefit by the governing party is a sufficient factor, and the presence of broader diaspora engagement policies is a mediating factor.

Our findings demonstrate that emigrants' active requests for participation are important but cannot fully explain the timing of VFA implementation. The impact of emigrants' efforts depends on the extent to which there is a growing interest in diaspora engagement policies and whether the evolution of domestic politics, particularly the interests of political parties, is conducive to their aims or not. Thus, emigrant lobbying for VFA should be framed in a way that is consistent with home states' priorities and/or should be directly targeted at political parties.

As extensive literature has pointed out, domestic politics may be more conducive when governments recognize the importance of emigrants related to issues, such as democratization, decentralization, new competitive electoral contexts, the need to respond to regional pressures, etc. Except for decentralization, these factors seem relevant to the Turkish case. Furthermore, sovereignty issues and the display of growing state international power could be seen as particularly relevant, specifically in parallel with increasing attention to the Turkish state's diaspora engagement strategies.

Our research further demonstrates the central importance of the role of the governing party and its interests. We found that VFA was implemented in 2014, because of the governing party's expectation that it would be beneficial in the critical presidential election, which required winning a majority vote. Considering the popularity of a particular candidate among migrants in the main host countries and the large electorate abroad, external votes were viewed as an opportunity to expand the governing party's constituency. This finding suggests that political parties, if they have an electoral interest, may be prominent actors in facilitating the introduction and implementation of VFA. Thus, this article supports the findings of other cases studies – such as on Mexico, Hungary, and Honduras – that parties that support VFA generally do so to maximize their votes, regardless of their ideological stance.

A comparative analysis of Turkey with another country that has recently implemented VFA may provide further insights. Countries that have introduced VFA provisions but have not yet fully

implemented them like Angola, Bolivia, Greece, and Nicaragua could be examined comparatively to test our findings.

These findings demonstrate the need to critically examine the competing and diverging dimensions of the diffusion of domestic politics that is further institutionalized through VFA. First, such diffusion may raise the concerns of host countries with large migrant populations, for instance Germany. It may spark discussions about migrants' integration and allegiances. Second, migrants themselves may be concerned about being perceived as "fifth column" voters by policymakers, which may affect their efforts for equal rights and damage their image as loyal host country citizens. Third, given the fact that many external voters are long-term non-residents, it is important to address questions such as how VFA and the weight of these votes in terms of representation are perceived by citizens residing in the home country. Lastly, VFA may influence the power relations in homeland political networks that are directly plugged into party politics. Additionally, human rights instruments and electoral standards initiatives should provide guidance on ensuring the transparency and integrity of VFA to eliminate some of these concerns.

Further research should take the dimension of citizenship into consideration. Although the developments related to VFA outlined here indicate the redrawing of political boundaries in Turkey, it appears that political participation and representation rights for migrants should be introduced simultaneously for inclusive and democratic citizenship. Considering that emigrants have expectations of their homelands different from those of the permanent residents of these countries, an emigrant's concerns could be most effectively represented by another emigrant. Parliamentary representation of citizens abroad by a pre-defined number of elected representatives by them could provide inclusiveness.

NOTES

1. Emphasis on these concepts can be traced to the official websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For instance, the recent Synopsis of Turkish Foreign Policy states that "Turkey has in fact become a leading country that works to expand the sphere of peace and prosperity in its region" (see Synopsis, 2015:1). Similar arguments were put forward in the several writings of Davutoğlu (see Davutoğlu, 2008).
2. The distribution of votes is a quite complex process. Votes from abroad are put together with votes in Turkey in proportion with the weight of each electoral district at a provincial level. The distribution amongst the parties is done according to the share of votes of the party in Turkey and the share of the party's votes from abroad (Electoral Law, 2008).

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