

Building Party Support Abroad: Turkish Diaspora Organisations in Germany and the UK

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Abstract

This article covers a unique form of political mobilisation within the Turkey-originated diasporic community in Europe that formed after Turkey introduced external voting in 2012. Although existing literature has paid attention to the impact of homeland political parties on external voting rights and diaspora organisations' role in electoral campaigns, these organisations' impact on members' mobilisation capacities for certain homeland parties remains understudied. This article tackles this topic by first comparing Turkey-originated diaspora organisations in Germany and the UK. Secondly, it guides future empirical work on the impact of the diaspora organisations on remote partisans' political orientation by taking the dominant emigrant profile in a residence country dimension into the study of external voting. Focusing on eligible Turkish citizens, the findings of this article are based on participant observation and 60 in-depth interviews conducted with remote voters who participated in the mobilisation of Turkey-based political parties in Germany between 2018 and 2023 and in the UK between 2021 and 2023 through diaspora organisations.

Keywords

diaspora organisations; external voting; Germany; non-resident citizens; UK; Turkey

1. Introduction

In the first week following the Turkish presidential and parliamentary elections on May 14th, 2023, German media was mainly occupied with one question (see, among others, Lisovenko, 2023; Maier, 2023): Why did Turkish citizens residing in Germany, who participated in the Turkish elections, predominantly support the right-wing, pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi [AKP]) and its

presidential candidate, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan? In the subsequent weeks of the same election, the German media's interest shifted to another query (see, among others, Schwanitz, 2023; Siggelkow, 2023): Why did some other countries with a substantial Turkish citizenry, like the UK, not show similar favour towards AKP and its presidential candidate? This question is not only pertinent to the recent 2023 election but has also been significant since the 2014 election, underpinning the primary question this article seeks to address: What is the relationship between diaspora organisations and the political orientation of non-resident Turkish citizens eligible to vote from abroad?

In parallel to the growing number of countries that allow their non-resident citizens to vote in the general elections of the origin country, over the past two decades, there has been an exponential increase in studies that examine the electoral rights of citizens living abroad. The legitimacy of external voting has been one well-studied aspect (Bauböck, 2009; Beckman, 2008; Collyer & Vathi, 2007; Ellis et al., 2007; Escobar, 2007; Smith, 2008). Yet many recent studies have also started to investigate the impact of non-resident voter turnout on national politics (Bureau & Popp, 2015; Gamlen, 2018), political inclusion of the diasporic population based on having granted or withheld voting rights (Finn & Ramaciotti, 2024; Palop-García & Pedroza, 2017; Wellman, 2021), the sending country's institutional performance regarding electoral turnout in residence countries (Adamson, 2018; Burgess, 2018, 2020; Finn & Besserer Rayas, 2022; Østergaard-Nielsen & Ciornei, 2019), political parties' interest in emigrants' associations (Fliess, 2021; Paarlberg, 2023), political parties' reach abroad (Gherghina & Soare, 2020; Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2023; Rashkova, 2020; Umpierrez de Reguero & Dandoy, 2023), and relationship between the migrant voter turnout and integration in the host society (Gherghina & Basarabă, 2024). However, there are still significant theoretical, conceptual, and empirical gaps in the external voting literature (as also reviewed in Umpierrez de Reguero et al., 2023).

Previous studies have largely overlooked the role and mobilisation capacity of diaspora organisations in influencing the political attitudes and behaviours of non-resident voters. The article shows that diaspora groups can influence Turkish voters living abroad, but the extent of their impact on which parties people choose to vote for depends on the most dominant diaspora profile from the same country of origin in that foreign country. Dominant emigrant profile varies in each residence country in terms of their emigration background including ethnicity, denomination, and differences in political and socio-cultural orientations. We argue that the activities and mobilisation capacities of these organisations, along with the dominant emigrant profile, are key factors in explaining the variation in voter preferences across different residence countries. By doing so, the article sheds light on the nexus between diaspora organisations in terms of their proximity to or affiliation with Turkey-based parties and their political/ideological stance within the current polarised political atmosphere in Turkey and the similarities in their support levels, despite differences in voter profile. We conducted a comparative study of Turkish citizens who have voted from Germany and the UK, where we observed contrasting patterns of support for the Turkish ruling party and opposition parties, to better understand the role of diaspora organisations on external voters.

Turkey's political presence outside the country is a topic that has captured many scholars' attention for decades, whereas the overseas presence of Turkey-based political parties has only recently been studied. This new interest mostly relates to the implementation of external voting in Turkey in 2012. Still, less is known about to what extent diaspora organisations can influence the political orientation of non-resident voters. Limited studies on the topic have for the most part explored how Turkey-based parties have been

structured extraterritorially (Yener-Roderburg, 2020, 2022, in press), diaspora politics of Turkey-based parties/Turkish state (Aksel, 2019; Arkilic, 2022; Çobankara, 2023), and single elections, focusing on relatively narrow dimensions of diaspora electoral behaviour or Turkey's role in diaspora mobilisation (Abadan-Unat et al., 2014; Akgönül, 2017; Arkilic 2021; Şahin Mencütek & Akyol Yılmaz, 2016; Şahin-Mencütek & Erdoğan, 2016; Sevi et al., 2019). This article aims to contribute to the literature on external voting by developing an exploratory analysis of two residence countries, Germany and the UK, in which Turkish citizens have largely voted for ideologically different parties over the course of the four consecutive parliamentary elections of Turkey.

The Turkish citizens residing in Germany who turned out to vote have been known for their generous support for the AKP and Erdoğan, whereas the ones in the UK overwhelmingly support the opposition parties, the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party/Green-Left Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi [HDP]/Yeşil Sol Parti [YSP]) and the centre-left Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi [CHP]; see Figure 1). These political orientations of the Turkish citizens in each residence country have even been entrenched from 2015 to 2023.

Using a comparative approach, this article builds on the findings of fieldwork conducted in Germany and the UK. These countries represent interesting settings hosting Turkey-originating diasporas with a strong political tendency towards certain political parties. This helps us explore the activities and impact of Turkey-based parties via diaspora organisations. Germany mostly attracted unskilled immigrants under the name of guest workers who represented the Turkish society at large, whereas emigration to the UK consisted mostly of refugees and asylum seekers who were predominantly Alevis and Kurds (Sirkeci et al., 2015; Umpierrez de Reguero et al., 2021). The qualitative analysis includes semi-structured interviews, participant observations (e.g., elections, partisan gatherings, cultural events), and informal conversations. We recruited 35 Turkish citizens in Germany and 25 in the UK using purposive sampling. The participants were affiliated with different diaspora organisations and Turkey-based political parties and were involved in the electoral mobilisation of these political parties throughout the Turkish parliamentary electoral periods of

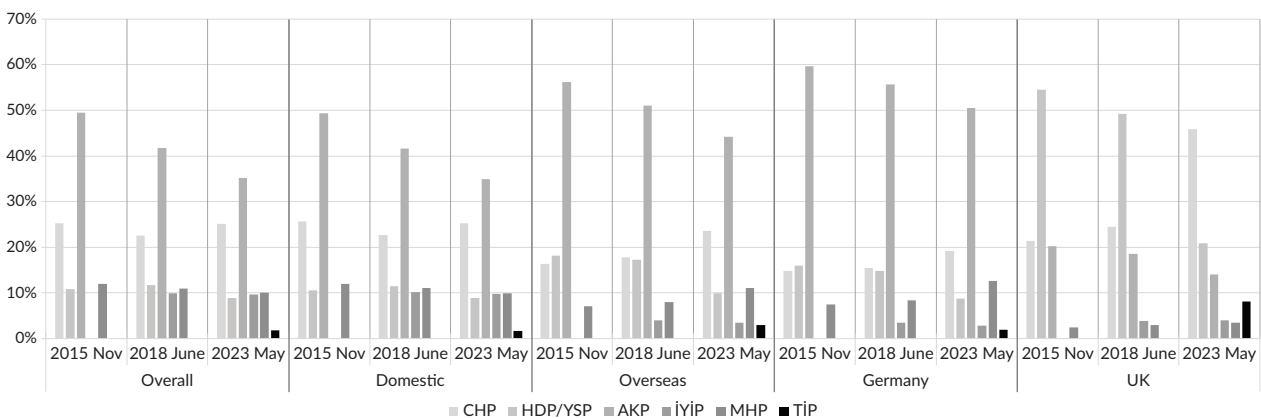


Figure 1. Results of the vote share for CHP, HDP/YSP, AKP, Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi [MHP]), Good Party (İyi Parti [İYİP]), and Workers' Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Partisi [TİP]) in the November 2015, June 2018, and May 2023 elections, categorised according to overall, domestic, overseas, Germany, and UK results. Note: The Good Party was founded in 2017, and, as such, is not included in the graph for the November 2015 elections. Source: Authors' work based on data from the Supreme Election Council (2023).

2018 and 2023 in Germany, primarily in Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia states, and in the UK, mainly in London and Manchester. We used narrative analysis to examine the data, focusing on how the participants constructed their identities, values, and loyalties through their stories. We also analysed the role of diaspora organisations in shaping the participants' political orientations and mobilisation. We approached potential participants at the different polling stations in Germany and the UK, as well as by visiting various cultural, religious, and political associations established by Turkey-originating people. In order to ensure the respondents' safety, for both country cases, the names and places of residence of the respondents are withheld.

In approaching this issue, this article first conceptualises diaspora organisations and their function in electoral mobilisation, highlighting the main theoretical and empirical gaps that our study aims to fill. Secondly, it provides a background on Turkey and non-resident voting, describing the historical, legal, and institutional context of Turkish emigration and external voting. Then the article presents our empirical findings on the role of diaspora organisations in building remote supporters in Germany and the UK, analysing the differences and similarities between the two countries. The final section concludes by summarising the main arguments and implications of our study, as well as by underscoring certain possible consequences of these findings for the wider body of literature.

2. Diaspora Organisations and Their Electoral Mobilisation

There are multiple ways to locate diaspora transnationalism. Finding or creating a plausible typology with which to categorise transnational migrants, as well as the degrees of mobility relating to transnational practice and orientation, is becoming a problematic task, especially because of transnationalism's lack of conceptual clarity (Lafleur, 2013, p. 3). Over the last couple of decades, a vast amount of scholarship has paid attention to the perspective of transnational social networks in relation to migration studies (see, among others, Kearney, 1986; Portes, 1998; Ryan, 2023; Ryan & Dahinden, 2021; Vertovec & Cohen, 1999). Migration is a highly complex process, so it is hard to create suitable typologies and categorisations that could come close to fitting all empirical cases. Tilly (1990) writes that "networks migrate; categories stay put; and networks create new categories" and adds that "the effective units of migration were (and are) neither individuals nor households but sets of people linked by an acquaintance, kinship, and work experience" (p. 84) who could be diaspora members and not necessarily immigrants. Therefore, since diaspora networks, *organisations* "provide the channels for the migration process itself" (Vertovec, 2009, p. 38), investigating the diaspora organisations in-depth is the necessary unit of analysis in this article. We acknowledge the reciprocal transformative influence between diaspora organisations and their members. Therefore, this study contends that diaspora organisations should not be perceived as autonomous entities separate from their members. Thus, it is a mistake to assume a unilateral relationship between them. Although these organisations have considerable influence on both the political preferences in elections and the mobilisation process, as this article demonstrates, the possibility that the members they mobilise within their own organisational structures may have different political preferences cannot be ruled out. Here, it may be meaningful to make a categorical distinction between these organisations, communities and involved individuals, to avoid reducing them to each other.

Several determinants make each diaspora group and their organisations unique. Two of the primary factors that have received scholarly attention are, first, the type of migration wave that each origin country causes and

how the residence country perceives these waves, and second, the impact of previous migration patterns and the networks that they created, which grow with continuing immigrant inflow from the same origin country. Besides these two factors, which determine forms of establishing an organisation and generate networks in transnational social spaces, other determinants interrupt the gradual evolution of the organisational structure of the migrant settings in the residence countries, altering or regenerating these settings in a relatively short amount of time. External voting is one of those critical determinants. A law provision that enables non-resident citizens to vote for the origin country from abroad (i.e., external voting) can interrupt the evolution of the transnational social spaces in diaspora mobilisation patterns and bring new dimensions into it and into diaspora organisations. In these spaces, the diasporic communities create or reshape their own political space. This space does not necessarily emerge as self-induced but can also be formed by external factors, including the origin country and diaspora communities in other residence countries, as linked to political transnationalism.

Political transnationalism established itself in studies in the early 2000s and, by and large, scholars agree on the definition of the concept, which focuses on the diaspora members' political connections and practices in relation to an origin country (Faist, 2004; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001). These connections and methods include voting from abroad, being a remote partisan for a homeland political party, and protesting, lobbying, and participating in overseas rallies of origin-country political parties. However, as briefly mentioned, there are also cases showing that origin-country political bodies such as parties sometimes make the connection by establishing either party branches or satellite diaspora organisations to serve their purposes (Faist & Özveren, 2004; Yener-Roderburg, 2020).

We contribute to debates around relationalities between non-resident citizens' voting incentives and political transnationalisation through diaspora organisations during origin-country elections by highlighting the importance of political mobilisation. It is a known phenomenon that, as compared to resident citizens, non-resident citizens are less willing to go to the ballot box (Itzigsohn & Villacrés, 2008). This is because, although being eligible to cast a vote is a prerequisite for voting, it is not the most significant determinant. Further studies show that it is the interactions with electoral mobilisers that are essential in determining electoral participation (Bernstein & Packard, 1997). Research by Bernstein and Packard (1997) and Rosenstone and Hansen (2003) underlines the importance of social networks in generating interpersonal interactions that mobilise voters with a direct impact on political participation, by stressing less effort at mobilisation as the primary cause of the decline in election turnout in the US between the 1960s and 1980s (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003). And, as a causal effect, "citizens who are contacted by political parties, exposed to intensely fought electoral campaigns, or inspired by the actions of social movements are more likely to vote, to persuade, to campaign, and to give" (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003, pp. 209–210).

Rolfe (2012) claims that "virtually all turnout is mobilized, either directly or indirectly, by campaigns and related activity" (p. 15). Thus, in the transnational context, the absence of homeland parties and political elites (such as candidates, organisations, activists, and the media) would affect "the salience of the election" (Rolfe, 2012, p. 15). Freedman's (2000) work on the Chinese immigrant community in the US also evidences that, "when there are electoral incentives for political elites to mobilize the [Chinese] community, then Chinese do participate in greater number than when there are weaker electoral concerns at stake" (p. 193). However, a unique situation occurs when the elections occur extraterritorially, where the homeland political parties by and large face similar difficulties in reaching nationals, so the mobilisation phenomenon becomes significantly more important. In the transnational context, implementing external voting is linked to several

operational procedures and external voting methods that are primarily impractical (e.g., requiring geographical proximity), which increases the importance of mobilising non-resident voters to participate in elections and other voting events. Here the diaspora organisations step in and become more relevant in understanding why support levels differ among the diaspora organisations and countries, while other aspects are mirrored. Although the Turkish extraterritorial voter turnout rate is considerably lower than mainland Turkey, it is still high in comparison to other countries' extraterritorial voter turnout rates (Jakobson et al., 2023). Furthermore, the turnout rate is increasing with each election, which suggests increased engagement with homeland politics and highlights the relevance of the case of Turkey, particularly considering the absence of parliament seats dedicated to extraterritorial constituency, meaning direct representation.

3. Turkey and Non-Resident Voting: Background

Unlike the symbolic external voting rights granted under Turgut Özal's rule in the late 1980s, since 2012 Turkey has adopted provisions that reflect the increasingly influential role of non-resident voters as political actors in domestic and diaspora politics (Yener-Roderburg, 2020). Together with the most recent presidential and parliamentary elections of May 2023, non-resident Turkish citizens have cast votes in at least one constitutional referendum and eight elections (four presidential and four parliamentary). The proportion of Turkish non-resident voters participating in elections has steadily risen, from 18.9% in 2014 to 56.3% during the presidential runoff election in 2023 (see Table 1). The substantial turnout of Turkish citizens using overseas ballot boxes since the 2015 parliamentary election has demonstrated the potential for external votes to influence the electoral landscape when they are distributed across the national electoral districts. Consequently, the distribution of non-resident votes has led to changes in the allocation of parliamentary seats; however, the non-resident vote did not have a game-changer impact on presidential elections since it was insufficient to close the gap between two candidates running for the second round. All considered, despite the fruitfulness of the field, existing studies on Turkey's external voting experience are scarce. This situation calls for underlining the legislative and provisional changes to the political party system and representation system to grasp the non-resident voting phenomenon in Turkey.

Table 1. Turnout rates in the Turkish elections for all non-resident and border-crossing voters (2014–2023).

Elections	Total number of registered external voters	Total number of cast votes	Voter turnout (%)	
			Border crossings	External overall
August 2014 presidential	2,798,726	530,116	10.0	18.9
June 2015 general	2,899,072	1,056,078	4.3	35.4
November 2015 general	2,899,069	1,298,325	4.8	43.5
April 2017 referendum	2,972,676	1,424,279	3.3	47.9
June 2018 general and presidential	3,047,323	1,525,279	5.5	50.2
May 2023 parliamentary and presidential	3,423,759	1,841,846	4.3	53.8
May 2023 presidential (run-off)	3,426,218	1,930,226	4.3	56.3

Source: Authors' work based on data from the Supreme Election Council (2023).

The political system in Turkey has undergone several recent changes. These include the extensive constitutional amendments in 2017 and the supposed transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system of government. However, presidentialism *alla Turca* has nothing in common with a presidential system, as both powers can shorten each other's terms of office/legislatures. With the separation of parliamentary and presidential elections, the competitive logic of the parties among themselves also changed (Tokatlı, 2020). The presidential candidate has a great interest in a parliamentary majority, which is why larger parties try to attract many smaller parties to their alliances. This applies to both parliamentary and presidential elections, where the aim is to win 50% plus one vote. The new election law introduced in 2018 brought about the possibility of electoral alliances. Here, parties could come together before the election and form an alliance, but still act largely independently in the elections; on one hand, it helped pass the parliamentary threshold (lowered from 10% to 7% in April 2022; see Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2022) but on the other hand, it promised further support to the presidential candidate when elected. During the 2018 elections, the total votes of the alliance determined the number of alliance seats in parliament, but in the last election held in 2023, the law was tightened and has become more attractive for smaller parties within alliances to run under the name of the larger party in the same list (Yener-Roderburg, in press).

In the realm of external voting, neither the party system nor electoral alliance may make any difference, as compared to in-country voters. Nevertheless, the representation issue is more complicated when it comes to non-resident citizens (see, among others, Hutcheson & Arrighi, 2015; Lisi et al., 2015). Unlike countries where external voters have special representation that secures seats in the legislature like France, Ecuador, and Italy, Turkey represents its external voters in the electoral system by *assimilated representation into the in-country voting total* (Yener-Roderburg, 2022). This means that the votes of non-resident citizens are distributed among existing national districts proportionate to the districts' population and the political party's voting rate within the total external votes. After the ballots are allocated, the electoral rules in the national territory will apply to the results. In this way, voters abroad cannot vote for independent candidates from a particular district. As a result of this vote-allocation method, which is still in force, smaller particularly opposition groups or individuals who might be regionally stronger are further disadvantaged; therefore, non-resident voters are limited in their voting decisions, and they turn towards political parties with higher vote potential.

4. Diaspora Organisations and Building Remote Supporters in Germany and the UK

This article builds on the findings based on fieldwork conducted in Germany and the UK. As noted, these countries offer an ideal context in which to examine and begin to understand why support for some Turkish political parties is stronger in certain countries and how the relation between the support level of diaspora organisations relates to the parties' country-specific success. Germany is by far the most popular residence country for Turkish citizens abroad and Turkey-originating diasporas, with the UK as the eighth (see Figure 2). Amidst the surge in Turkish migration to Germany since the early 1960s, driven by economic and political factors, the country maintains its status as the favoured destination for Turkish nationals seeking to emigrate, nurturing diverse diasporic communities from Turkey across various migration waves. Similarly, despite the smaller size of the Turkish-speaking minority in the UK, it is also characterised by heterogeneity, including Turks, Kurds, Alevis, and Sunnis from different parts and regions of Turkey, as well as Cypriot and Balkan Turks (King et al., 2008; Sirkeci et al., 2016). Moreover, even with recent waves of skilled immigrants from Turkey to Germany, the overall number still leans heavily towards the immigrants—previously defined within the category of guest workers—who continue to constitute a significant portion of the Turkish society present in

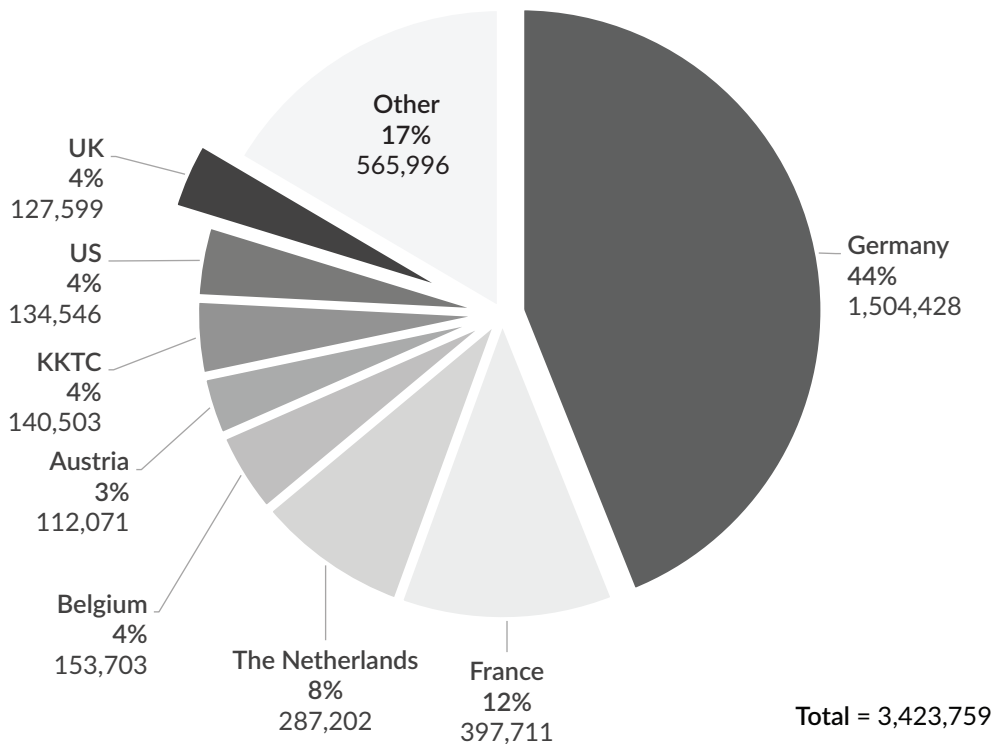


Figure 2. Percentage share of registered non-resident Turkish voters in the 2023 Turkish presidential and parliament elections per country. Source: Authors' work based on data from the Supreme Election Council (2023).

the country. Emigration to the UK from Turkey dates to the 1980s and consists of mostly political refugees and asylum seekers, mostly Alevis and Kurds. This situation made the UK a residence country for (proportionately) the largest Turkish diaspora population abroad that supports opposition parties. Additionally, these countries offer democratically freer circumstances than Turkey that allow the activities of not only the governing parties of Turkey, which have the chance of using the government sources to a greater extent in and outside of Turkey, but also new political parties, such as HDP/YSP, which has encountered many burdens in Turkey, including the risk of closure (HDP Europe, 2023) and imprisoned MPs and partisans (European Parliament, 2021).

Despite the political orientation differences of the Turkey-originating migrant profile in Germany and the UK, the ways in which non-resident Turkish citizens were mobilised as well as motivated to vote in the Turkish elections through diaspora organisations for certain political parties were highly similar. Some of the mobilising strategies of the parties arose both from conventional channels and also from non-traditional forms of campaigning, such as canvassing and enrolling voters in the non-resident electoral register, organising public rallies, and coordinating shuttle buses to transport individuals to polling stations. Thus, it would be easier to narrow down our research focus on the organisations rather than comparing these residence countries or their relation to their domestic diasporas. Against this backdrop and given the limited space, this article does not reveal every voting motivation stirred by non-resident voters through diaspora organisations. Rather, we show the ways in which the diaspora organisations influence their members' motivation to vote and their vote choice.

The overlapping motivations of various diaspora groups/individuals are hard to limit in relation to diaspora organisations. There are many organisations and, accordingly, there are many supporting actors with various

voting motivations at the institutional and individual levels. Thus, with no intention of dismissing the importance of the unmentioned diaspora organisations, for our purpose, the most prominent trans-local umbrella organisations and their members who also represent the greater part of the pro-AKP groupings in Germany and pro-HDP/YSP and pro-CHP groupings in the UK, and which obtained a political stance following the non-resident Turkish enfranchisement, will be scrutinised. These organisations are the Union of European Turkish Democrats (Avrupa Türk Demokratlar Birliği [UID], also known as UETD), the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği [DITIB]), and the Turkish Federation in Germany (Almanya Demokratik Ülkücü Türk Dernekleri [ADÜTDF]) in Germany, and the British Alevi Foundation (Britanya Alevi Federasyonu [BAF]), Kurdish Community Centres in Britain (Kürt Halk Meclisleri), and CHP Representation in the UK.

4.1. Germany

Since its victory in the 2002 election, the AKP, as the dominant party with exclusive access to state resources, has established a centralised organisational structure both locally and nationally, echoing the setup of other political parties in Turkey (Doğan, 2017). Examining the elections and referendum from 2015 to 2023 reveals the AKP's expansion of influence overseas, notably in Germany (Arkilic, 2022). This has been mostly via the UID. With President Erdoğan's sponsorship, the UID was established in Cologne, Germany, in 2004. Currently, the foundation has 54 branches across Western Europe, including 15 in Germany and one in the UK (UID, 2023). Since its foundation, the UID has mirrored AKP political stances and developed along AKP lines organisationally and politically during and also non-electoral periods (UID member, April 2018). Therefore, UID was also involved in the AKP's election campaign. The UID did not only organise and coordinate AKP rallies and cadre visits but also led the AKP's overseas election coordination which is also known as Local Election Coordination Centres (Seçim Koordinasyon Merkezleri). An UID member stated the following on his role in AKP mobilisation:

We [UID members] are surely part of the election coordination. It is our job. I personally for example get some time off from my actual work to be able to coordinate my team [electoral coordination] during the elections to help people get to the polling stations. (UID member, May 2023)

DITIB also stands out as an important AKP mobilising agency in Germany. Despite it being known that DITIB has been the foremost instrumentalised foreign policy tool of the AKP since the party was established in 2001, DITIB is also known for its service to any government that ruled Turkey since 1984. However, seeing DITIB as a loyal supporter of AKP, the party that facilitated the expansion of the organisation's reach to 1,000 mosques in Germany (DITIB, 2023) and 17 in the UK, would only be valid so long as AKP-rule continues. Therefore, the current pro-AKP stance of the DITIB was not a secret (Carol & Hofheinz, 2022; Öcal, 2022). Furthermore, considering the number of DITIB mosques, coordinating mobilisation via these mosques not only made the activities more accessible but also extended the party's reach undeniably. One of the DITIB officers justified his AKP-favouring stance with the following:

I am not able to say anything against what my state says. Thus, I should not have been expected to say anything against Turkey's President Erdoğan within my mosque, and I would forbid anyone from saying anything against him under my mosque's roof too. (DITIB imam, May 2023)

AKP-supporting organisations in Germany were not limited only to the mentioned openly pro-AKP formations. ADÜTDF, also known as the Grey Wolves, an ultra-nationalist group affiliated with the far-right MHP (Lemmen, 2000), have also shown indirect support for the AKP during Turkish elections. ADÜTDF today has approximately 170 local chapters and up to 20,000 supporters in Germany (Klein & Klausner, 2023; Topcu, 2020). Since 2018, MHP has been in the electoral coalition, People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı), and a partner of AKP. This situation instigated a whole new dynamic in the party sympathisers' approach to each other, as well as to the affiliated organisations' approach to one another. According to the electoral law, each ballot box must have a balloting committee consisting of five members: two government officers and representatives of the three most voted political parties according to the last election held (for the 2023 balloting committee, these were AKP, CHP, and MHP). The most recent Turkish elections of 2023 showed that MHP members show up at AKP rallies or take part in organisational tasks (Schmidt, 2023). It has also been observed that MHP sympathisers at the ballot boxes were filling AKP's representative's spot when the need arose. An interviewee stated:

I am a nationalist. That is how I identify myself. I would never say that I am an AKP supporter. An electoral coalition is something. But no one can tell me that I support AKP. What I can safely say is that I am definitely not sympathising with other parties [outside of People's Alliance]. (ADÜTDF member, May 2023)

4.2. The UK

The most important difference between the Turkish-speaking diaspora in the UK, in contrast to mainland Europe, is the domination of left-wing homeland movements and parties. Among all these groups, the Kurdish community in the UK is comparatively far more engaged in political activity (Cakmak & Kalantzi, 2019). The first Kurdish Community Centre which was parallel to the emergence of the Kurdish political movement in the UK, established in London in 1985, is the best example of ardent and loyal supporters in the UK, which could mobilise a considerable number of voters from the Kurdish community in every prior election. In the run-up to the elections, it was decided to enter the elections under the mantle of YSP in case the pro-Kurdish HDP was closed following a potential Supreme Court ruling (Kucukgocmen, 2023). As a result, HDP/YSP representatives took part in the polls with more observers than any other party. It is possible to read this as a sign of perseverance of the Kurdish voters abroad, despite the marginalisation and criminalisation of their own party—Even if the name of the party changes, they embrace the new party which aligns with the Kurdish political movement. A Kurdish Community Centre member noted that:

Yesterday it was HDP, today it is YSP, tomorrow it will be something else, nothing changes for us, we are here, there are as many observers as you see here, and there are also others waiting in reserve. We are ready, as always. (HDP/YSP observer, May 2023)

The Alevi population in the UK also has a significant presence within the diaspora community. BAF, established in 2013, has a considerable mobilisation capacity during the Turkish elections with its 17 cultural centres that claim to reach around 300,000 Alevis in the UK (British Alevi Federation, 2023). The voting orientation of Alevis, however, fluctuates with the current situation. Although, previously, Alevis were likely to vote for CHP, the inclusive and radical democratic political stance of the HDP in the 2015 as well as 2018 parliamentary elections attracted Alevi voters, especially Kurdish Alevis. However, in the 2023 election, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu,

the chairman of the CHP, became a candidate for the presidency and publicly declared that he was proud to be an Alevi in parallel to the press statement of the European Confederation of Alevi Associations (Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Konfederasyonu) in which BAF is also a member of, calling on their members to support Kılıçdaroğlu at the ballot box (AABK, 2023), has also attracted Alevi voters in the UK towards CHP, increasing the party's vote share. One interviewee on this matter detailed her changing view of CHP: "I had resentments against the CHP in the past, but for this election, something different is being tried, Kılıçdaroğlu stood up for his identity. This is an important milestone. We need to support him and his party" (BAF member, May 2023).

This example illustrates that the diaspora community can exhibit different political tendencies according to the developments in origin-country politics and that the organisation is not the unilateral determinant in this, but rather comes to the fore through its mobilising capacity. This example also indicates situational support in terms of a shift in votes between different opposition parties, which might be considered as alternatives to each other. However, it can also be indicative in mobilisation processes and increasing turnout rates (the non-resident turnout rate in the UK raised from 42% in 2018 to 50% in the 2023 parliament elections and 53% in the second round of the 2023 presidential elections), as this is the case when Alevis show their support for CHP which became the leading party in the UK in the last election. Alevi communities do not demonstrate any unwavering support for a specific political party; instead, they are likely to favour the parties that they find close to them, dependent on time and circumstance. The intersectional compositions of Alevi identities in the UK (as demonstrated with, e.g., Kurdish Alevis) are also reflected in their voting behaviours where Alevis can individually vote for different parties, albeit predominantly in opposition.

In the last election, the most striking situation in the UK, especially among opposition voters, was the interest shown in the TİP. TİP's discourses and increasing visibility through the visits of its popular PM candidates to the UK attracted some of the voters who had voted for HDP/YSP and CHP in the past to turn towards TİP in the 2023 elections. CHP Representation in the UK was formed in 2013 and has spread in the major cities in the UK since then has sizable supporters which has turned the organisation into a well-functioning politically motivated diaspora organisation ("CHP İngiltere Birliği," 2013). However, some of the CHP representatives at the balloting committees stated that they voted for the TİP instead of the party they were representatives of. For example, one of the interviewees who is a member of CHP Representation in the UK stated: "We voted for Kılıçdaroğlu in the presidential election, so we feel comfortable about it. But this time I want a real change, so I voted for TİP [for the parliamentary election]" (CHP representative, May 2023).

Thus, this example shows that even if party organisations are effective on organisational issues such as mobilisation and taking part in elections, there may be different individual political preferences within the diaspora community. In other words, they do not have a direct influence on such preferences as organisations. TİP appears to be an alternative for other opposition parties HDP/YSP and CHP, while the mobilisation of voters still depends primarily on party organisations. It is striking to see that the party member still uses the pronoun "we" when he mentions his party organisation, CHP, while the pronoun turned into "I" when he underlines his changing preference for the parliamentary election. In this case, on the one hand, voting for Kılıçdaroğlu for the presidency and taking part in the organisational tasks during the election provided comfort for the CHP member and kept the party loyalty protected in a sense which can be compared with the MHP member in Germany case; on the other hand, this made it possible to support other alternative parties for the parliamentary election too.

5. Conclusion

Turkey-originating diaspora organisations in Germany and the UK show similarities in the ways in which their members display party loyalty towards different Turkey-originating parties, despite the political orientation differences. Both cases reveal the centrality of the diaspora profile at large in the residence country, which determines the origin-country party support levels, once non-resident citizens have external voting rights. These cases also demonstrate the ruling party's advantage, which includes but is not limited to making use of state resources for its own benefit.

By drawing out the consequent shift in the relation between the factions that stemmed from various migration waves to the residence countries, we move the discussion away from motivations for voting. However accurate they might be, it is the parties' out-of-country organisational structures, here being the Turkey-originating diaspora organisations in Germany and the UK, that form the key players in determining their members' political orientation in the countries where they are based. While our qualitative study faces limitations, organisations exemplified with AKP-affiliated UID and HDP/YSP-affiliated Kurdish political movement and community centres in Britain showed that their continuous support for these parties is ensured; BAF and pro-AKP DITIB indicated that unconditional continuity of such support cannot be guaranteed; AKP-favouring ADÜTDF and newly emerging support from members of the CHP Representation in the UK and HDP/YSP (other than their loyal supporters) for TİP presented support based on individual preferences depending on changing political actors and circumstances beyond the organisations' direct impact.

Given the scarce literature on the relationship between party mobilisation abroad and diaspora organisations' impact on members for certain origin-country parties, the Turkish case poses an important example since it broadens our understanding of the significance and existence of diaspora organisations' operations and role in remote mobilisation. By comparing Turkey-originating diaspora organisations in Germany and the UK with political orientations—the former prone to AKP and the latter being left-wing—this article demonstrates that diaspora organisations stand out as a key determinant of political mobilisation, which has hereto been largely overlooked in the external voting scholarship. The emerging alliances under the changed electoral law of 2012 and the profiles of presidential candidates also impact political mobilisation via diaspora organisations. Nevertheless, the upcoming research agenda should include voting eligibility of emigrants' profiles and recognize that non-electoral forms of political engagement are still part of the external voting phenomenon since they play a role in the electoral processes of origin countries and diaspora organisations. In this way, the reach of diaspora organisations will receive the attention they deserve as key players in politicising and mobilising their members, which directly impacts the origin country's electoral process and outcomes.

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Conflict of Interests

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