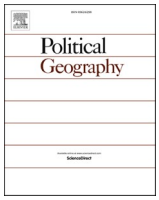
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Full Length Article



Transnational party activism: Why do migrants become active in political parties from their country of origin?

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ABSTRACT

Political parties are increasingly active abroad, conducting election campaigns and, in some cases, maintaining organisational infrastructures in foreign countries. These efforts largely rely on emigrant party activists who donate their time and often their own resources. While existing research has examined emigrant voting and party outreach, we know less about what motivates emigrants to become involved in transnational parties and how such motivations vary across transnational contexts. This study contributes to this debate, situating it in both the political party membership and transnationalism literatures. It employs a comparative analysis of Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian party activists in Spain, extensive ethnographic fieldwork, and other original data sources. Findings show that party activists expressed political, emotional, and—more selectively—career and socialising motivations, while facing substantial resource constraints. This article argues that the transnational migratory context reshapes how these motivations and constraints operate, and that the transnational electoral system design and variation in parties' overseas presence selectively reconfigure their salience abroad. These results extend and refine previous research on transnational party activism from developing and advanced democracies.

1. Introduction

Political parties are increasingly expanding their activities beyond national borders. A systematic literature review reveals that, to date, political parties from at least 50 countries organise abroad. This includes parties from Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia, North America, and Oceania (see e.g., Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2020; Van Haute & Kernalegenn, 2021, 2023). This development has coincided with the global spread of external voting rights (Brand, 2014; Collyer, 2014; Fliess et al., 2025; Umpierrez de Reguero et al., 2023; Wellman et al., 2023). Transnational campaigning can significantly impact country of origin[1] elections (Burgess & Tyburski, 2020; Gamlen, 2015).

Beyond campaigning in foreign cities, parties conduct lobbying, and participate in immigrant community projects (Bermúdez, 2016; Gherghina & Soare, 2023; Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2020; Levitt, 2001; Paarlberg, 2019; Rashkova & Van Der Staak, 2020; Umpierrez de Reguero & Dandoy, 2023; Østergaard-Nielsen & Ciornei, 2019). While for some of these activities parties can draw on transnational, state-funded structures (Burgess, 2018; Jakobson et al., 2023; Yener-Roderburg & Yetiş, 2024), they also rely on emigrants on the ground. Transnational party activity is sustained, and sometimes even initiated, by citizens abroad (Gherghina & Soare, 2023; Jakobson et al., 2021). They put up posters, distribute flyers, mobilie local networks, organise events, staff party chapters, stand as candidates in extra-territorial districts, organise protests, and act as poll watchers on election day. Most importantly, emigrant party activists[2] donate substantial time and often their own money. They demonstrate an overwhelming commitment to a party that seeks office in a country where they no longer reside. What motivates migrants to dedicate parts of their lives to a transnational party? Why do they become involved, and what constrains transnational party activism?

Despite the vital role emigrants play in sustaining transnational party activity, these questions remain understudied. I define transnational party activism as emigrants' frequent, informal or formal involvement in country of origin related high-intensity party activities during and between elections, "such as campaigning, organizing, fund-raising, and

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[1] I use "country of origin" throughout rather than "home country" because migrants may experience both their country of origin and country of residence as home (see Umpierrez de Reguero et al., 2023).

[2] I use "party activist" throughout to refer to both formal party members and non-members who do party work, reflecting the mix of formal and flexible affiliation common in many parties (Scarrow, 2015; Van Haute and Gauja, 2015).

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attending meetings as well as seeking and achieving elected office", because "democratic politics is impossible without them" (Whiteley & Seyd, 2002, pp. 1–2). Political geography, political science, and migration scholarship have, so far, largely examined emigrant voting (e.g., Ash & Turcu, 2024; Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020; McIlwaine & Bermúdez, 2015; Szulecki et al., 2023; Tagina & Corrado, 2023), overlooking emigrants' roles as party activists.

Broader transnationalism research often relies on umbrella concepts such as emigrant "engagement" or "involvement", each combining a wide spectrum of cross-border political practices,[3] such as voting, donating, campaigning and working in grassroots organisations (Ahmadov & Sasse, 2016; Guarnizo et al., 2003, 2019; Snel et al., 2016). Because these acts entail different levels of commitment, such research struggles to analytically isolate the specific dynamics of high-intensity party activism. This article addresses these limitations by systematically examining emigrants' motivations for transnational party activism.

My theoretical expectations about emigrants' reasons for transnational party activism build on the domestic party membership literature, which identifies four key motivations—political, emotional, career, and socialising—alongside resource constraints (Pérez et al., 2020; Piñeiro & Rosenblatt, 2017; Ribeiro & Do Amaral, 2019; Seyd & Whiteley, 1992; Webb et al., 2020; Whiteley & Seyd, 2002). This article argues that the transnational migratory context reshapes how these motivations and constraints operate, and that the transnational electoral system and variation in parties' overseas presence selectively reconfigure their salience abroad. To advance this argument, I combine the party activism with the political transnationalism literatures to develop a conceptual framework and derive expectations. I then examine those with a comparative study of Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian party activists in Spain, drawing on extensive ethnographic fieldwork, alongside other original data.

To preview the key findings, interviewed activists expressed a desire to shape domestic politics from abroad and often also described aims to influence emigrant policies that affect their situation overseas. Emotional bonds emerged through identification with party leaders—a common feature of Latin America's personalized and fragile party systems (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013)—but also through patriotic sentiments. Resource constraints shaped activism abroad, as limited party funding shifted participation and recruitment costs onto emigrants. These more nuanced findings refine research on emigrant party activists from advanced democracies (Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021; Dain, 2025; Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2025).

The comparative analysis shows that parties' transnational organisational presence and electoral systems selectively shape career and socialising motivations. Career ambitions emerged as patronage expectations, prevalent in Latin America (Stokes et al., 2013), were reproduced abroad, but are especially pronounced when the electoral system, like Ecuador's, incentivises parties to nominate emigrants as candidates. By contrast, motivations to socialise with co-nationals were less salient in interview narratives and, when they did emerge, were more common among activists in parties with year-round transnational activity, where sustained involvement can facilitate lasting friendships. By treating parties' transnational presence and the electoral system as intervening factors, this article advances transnational party activism research and contributes to debates in political geography and political science on how electoral system design can sustain state-diaspora ties (Gamlen, 2008; Pedroza & Palop-García, 2017; Ragazzi, 2014).

Existing research stresses the importance of studying transnational parties beyond the Global North to better understand how parties organise, thrive and survive abroad (Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2020; Van Haute & Kernalegenn, 2021, 2023). Case studies of Dominican (Levitt, 2001), Salvadorian (Paarlberg, 2019), and Mexican parties (Paarlberg, 2023) show how transnational party activism affects election dynamics. By systematically analysing why Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian emigrants become involved in transnational party activism, this article contributes to, and extends, this body of work.

The remainder of the article develops the conceptual framework, outlines the case selection, data, and methods, and then analyses the motivations of Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian party activists in Spain. The discussion synthesises commonalities and differences across parties and countries before the conclusion.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Motivations for high-intensity party activism

The general incentive model (GIM) (Seyd & Whiteley, 1992) "was introduced specifically to explain the incidence of high-intensity types of participation, such as canvassing, attending meetings, and running for office" (Whiteley & Seyd, 2002, p. 51) and has become the standard theoretical micro-level approach to explain party activism (Poletti et al., 2019; Van Haute and Gauja, 2015). The GIM goes beyond rational choice approaches, which struggle to explain why individuals join parties despite its high costs and negligible individual impact. While party activists invest their own resources, the policies advanced by their parties benefit everyone, including those who do not politically participate.

The GIM highlights additional incentives that exclusively benefit party activists. They believe their involvement can make a real difference, either for the collective or for personal benefit. Research on high-intensity party activism is somewhat ambiguous (Combes, 2011; Espinoza & Madrid, 2010; Muñoz-Armenta et al., 2013; Pérez et al., 2020; Piñeiro & Rosenblatt, 2017; Ribeiro & Do Amaral, 2019; Webb et al., 2020; Whiteley & Seyd, 2002), but indicates that important factors are: 1) political motivations, 2) emotional motivations, 3) political career motivations, 4) socialising motivations, and 5) activists' and parties' resources. As I will discuss next, the transnational setting may reconfigure how these motivations operate.

2.2. Emigrants' motivations for transnational party activism

Do transnational party activists' motivations differ from those of domestic ones? Latin American domestic party activists primarily emphasise political motivations—35%-50%, depending on the survey (Pérez et al., 2020; Piñeiro & Rosenblatt, 2017; Ribeiro & Do Amaral, 2019). They collectively seek influence over policies or political developments (Seyd & Whiteley, 1992, p. 62). However, once abroad migrants may gradually shift their focus from origin to residence country politics (Ahmadov & Sasse, 2016, p. 101). From this perspective, transnational party activism should be less driven by political motivations and more by non-political ones. Yet evidence from British and American Democrats abroad (Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021; Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2025), as well as Paris based activists from Spanish Podemos and Greek Syriza (Dain, 2025; Siotos, 2020) finds political motivations predominate. Here, political developments in the country of origin often pull migrants into transnational party activism. This dynamic likely transfers to other cases.

Bolivians, Ecuadorians, and Peruvians emigrated to Spain mainly in the 2000s, primarily to improve their livelihoods, amid contexts of economic instability and political mismanagement in their countries of origin (Rosas & Gay, 2015). Such economic and political crises may motivate some emigrants to pursue political change through transnational party activism, particularly when transnational parties are perceived as effective channels for change. Beyond "homeland politics",

[3] Additionally, emigrant "engagement" and "involvement" are sometimes conflated, though conceptually different: engagement refers to low-intensity political acts, such as donating or following news, whereas involvement denotes more intensive participation forms, such as volunteering for a transnational party. In this article, I use "involvement" and "activism" interchangeably as both terms refer to higher-intensity political acts.

focused on domestic policy, transnational party activism may also target "emigrant politics", centred on emigrants' economic, social and political situations abroad (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003, p. 762). Although Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru have adopted policies to address those needs, party activism offers a channel to further shape these policies and potentially resist recent rollbacks (Palop-García & Pedroza, 2021). Overall, we can expect that political motivations inform the transnational party activism of Bolivians, Ecuadorians and Peruvians in Spain.

Emotional motivations refer to "an expressive attachment to their party … unrelated to cognitive calculations of the costs and benefits of membership" (Whiteley & Seyd, 2002, p. 56). In Latin America, such attachments often centre on prominent leaders who supersede party labels (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013) and attract recruits (Combes, 2011; Espinoza & Madrid, 2010, p. 119). The appeal of such figures can transcend borders, especially when they nourish emigrants' sense of belonging (Boccagni, 2011; Jakobson et al., 2023). Emotional attachments are also "expressed in terms of idealistic goals …, which have obvious policy implications. But the moral imperative is the driving force behind the decision to participate" (Seyd & Whiteley, 1992, p. 63). For example, youth party activists in Chile frequently express a desire to "help others" (Espinoza & Madrid, 2010, p. 99). Similar dynamics may shape transnational party activism, especially among emigrants who were born and socialised in the country of origin (Snel et al., 2016). Studies of British and American party activists abroad identify altruistic motivations, sometimes intertwined with patriotic sentiments or a sense of civic duty (Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021; Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2025). These motivations are underpinned by a sense of responsibility toward the country and people left behind, as well as aspirations of eventual return. In sum, emotional motivations (party leader identification, patriotism, altruism) are expected to inform the transnational party activism of Bolivians, Ecuadorians and Peruvians in Spain.

Party activism can be "a way of meeting like-minded and interesting people, and for some this is motive enough for getting involved" (Seyd & Whiteley, 1992, p. 60; Webb et al., 2020; Whiteley & Seyd, 2002). In some Latin American countries (Espinoza & Madrid, 2010; Muñoz-Armenta et al., 2013; Ribeiro & Do Amaral, 2019, p. 503; but see, Combes, 2011), however, socialising motivations appear less salient for high-intensity party activism, as political motivations prevail. Socialising motivations may nonetheless appear among migrants experiencing social isolation (Snel et al., 2016), particularly when language barriers (Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021) or limited access to organised migrant collectives constrain socialising. In Spain, however, Bolivians, Ecuadorians and Peruvians speak the official language and often organise in socio-cultural associations (Aparicio & Tornos, 2010), creating favourable conditions for socialising outside transnational parties. This context may make transnational parties less central as social spaces, so socialising motivations may be less salient in interview narratives among Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian emigrant party activists.

Career ambitions are central to explaining party activism in many Latin American countries (Combes, 2011; Muñoz-Armenta et al., 2013; Piñeiro & Rosenblatt, 2017; Sells, 2020; but see Ribeiro & Do Amaral, 2019; Pérez et al., 2020, Ch. 3). Clientelism and patronage are prevalent in Latin America (Stokes et al., 2013), but the transnationalism literature remains ambiguous whether such political imprints persist abroad or change through emigrants' exposure to the new political environment (e.g., Bilodeau, 2014). This may depend on whether transnational parties can credibly offer political career pathways to emigrants. For example, transnational British party activists (Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021), unlike their domestic counterparts (Webb et al., 2020), rarely report career ambitions, a pattern possibly linked to the UK's electoral system which prohibits candidacies from abroad. As Ecuadorian and Peruvian parties can field non-resident candidates, we can expect political career ambitions to emerge among their emigrant party activists in Spain.

Finally, party activism in Latin America is often exercised by individuals with higher education (Espinoza & Madrid, 2010; Muñoz-Armenta et al., 2013; Ribeiro & Do Amaral, 2019), a pattern also visible transnationally (Ahmadov & Sasse, 2016; Guarnizo et al., 2003; Snel et al., 2016), pointing to resource constraints that limit transnational party activism. Political parties can alleviate these constraints through targeted recruitment, increased campaign budgets, low membership fees, and salaries (Scarrow, 2015; Van Haute and Gauja, 2015). However, while Latin American parties campaign transnationally, they often possess few financial means (Fliess, 2021), meaning that the costs of joining and participating fall heavily on individuals transnationally. Accordingly, resource constraints are expected to shape the party activism of Bolivians, Ecuadorians and Peruvians abroad.

2.3. *The presence of parties abroad and its consequences for party activism*

The GIM posits that parties motivate individuals to become active by offering a range of incentives. Yet motivations for high-intensity activism can vary by party (Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021; Piñeiro & Rosenblatt, 2017; Whiteley & Seyd, 2002). This variation is likely linked to differences in the incentives that parties can and want to offer. Some parties are more active abroad than others (Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2020; Paarlberg, 2019; Umpierrez de Reguero & Dandoy, 2023; Østergaard-Nielsen & Ciornei, 2019), possibly shaping incentive structures for transnational party activism. In connection with the previously discussed motivations and resource constraints, transnationally more active parties, such as those that invest in transnational campaigning and remain active abroad during non-electoral times, may offer a more credible platform for political claims-making, foster emotional attachment through frequent leader visits, signal potential career pathways through transnational candidacies, enable year-round socialising, and reduce participation costs by covering organisational and recruitment expenses. Accordingly, we can expect a transnationally stronger party presence to invoke a larger set of motivations for transnational party activism, while mitigating resource constraints.

Transnational party outreach tends to differ by country due to variations in their electoral systems. Designated parliamentary seats for emigrants, as in Italy, France, and Romania, foster transnational campaigning (Østergaard-Nielsen & Ciornei, 2019). In contrast, parties may remain weakly institutionalized abroad when emigrants are disenfranchised (Siotos, 2020) or when electoral systems assimilate emigrant votes into the total national count, thereby reducing emigrants' electoral weight (Kalu & Scarrow, 2020). Parties' increased interest in transnational presence will also boost demand for volunteers, encouraging them to offer benefits. Building on the previously discussed motivations and resource constraints, this may include incorporating emigrant-specific demands, visiting overseas branches to strengthen emotional ties, opening transnational career pathways, organizing socialising events, and covering organisational costs. This can become a self-reinforcing dynamic, as parties with a stronger presence abroad, especially those strongly invested in transnational campaigning and active in non-electoral periods, can, as previously discussed, more easily offer such participation benefits. Amongst the three studied case, only Ecuador reserves parliamentary seats for emigrants—a feature that encourages transnational party outreach (Østergaard-Nielsen & Ciornei, 2019) and persisted despite recent reforms (Palop-García & Pedroza, 2021)—whereas Bolivia and Peru do not. We can therefore expect that emigrant party activists in Ecuadorian parties will report a greater variety of motivations for party activism.

3. Methodology

This study examines the transnational party activism of Bolivians, Ecuadorians and Peruvians in Barcelona, Spain. Three key criteria guided the country of origin selection. First, each has a substantial emigrant population, making transnational party activity more likely (Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2020). Second, I focus on Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian parties in Europe to extend USA-centred research

(e.g., Paarlberg, 2019). All three have sizeable electorates abroad, with many living in Europe (see Appendix A; Table A.1 for emigrant population patterns across 21 Latin American countries). Bolivian and Ecuadorian migration to Spain began in the early 2000s, while Peruvian immigration grew substantially from the 1990s (Rosas & Gay, 2015).

Third, to assess electoral system effects comparatively, all three countries allow emigrant voting but provisions for extra-territorial representation differ. Emigrants in all cases can vote in presidential elections. Ecuadorians and Peruvians also have active and passive legislative suffrage. Ecuador additionally reserves six parliamentary seats for emigrants, with two allocated to the Europe, Asia, and Oceania constituency. Peru has since adopted a similar system following Law 31032 (July 2020), but during fieldwork candidates could run only on in-country party lists; the analysis therefore refers to the pre-reform context. In all three cases, emigrants vote in person.[4]

Because emigrant activists primarily interact with parties at the local level (Levitt, 2001), I situate this study in Barcelona, a frequent fieldwork site in research on Latin American transnational politics (e.g., Bermúdez, 2016; Guarnizo et al., 2019). Greater Barcelona hosts Spain's largest Bolivian community and the second-largest Ecuadorian and Peruvian communities (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2020). Diasporas can organise freely (Aparicio & Tornos, 2010). Major Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian parties campaigned and have an official representative in Barcelona, while their countries operate consulates there that administer external voting.

Fieldwork was conducted in Barcelona from January 2018 to March 2019, with one additional observation in July 2019. Field access relied on contacts established at consulate and migrant association events, with referrals facilitating additional access. I identified 14 Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian parties in Barcelona that had campaigned in previous elections. Applying a purposive sampling method (Miles et al., 2014), I interviewed their official representative in Barcelona or, if not available, a lower-tier party branch coordinator.[5] For highly active parties, I interviewed additional activists (e.g. campaign volunteer) to learn more about their activities. For Ecuador, I also interviewed two emigrant MPs and several emigrant candidates. All party activists were "high-intensity" activists (Webb et al., 2020, p. 259) who had participated in at least one election. The final party activist sample comprises 36 individuals (25 men, 11 women), spanning ruling/opposition parties, various party families and levels of institutionalization, including parties that cultivate diaspora support (e.g. MPAIS) or do not (e.g. PPK). Table B.1 (Appendix B) lists parties and interviewees' roles. Since the fieldwork was completed, some of these parties have changed names or been dissolved. For clarity, Table B.2 indicates these changes. MPAIS activists are overrepresented (10 interviewees) due to the party's strong presence, internal factionalism, and successful recruitment of association leaders, whom I interviewed to capture the broader transnational field in Barcelona (see below). Additionally, both emigrant MPs were MPAIS activists. This analysis focuses on MPAIS under Correa, before the party split in 2017.

Beyond party activists, I interviewed 20 leaders of prominent migrant associations and federations in Barcelona to map the socio-cultural context in which parties operate and generate contacts (see Appendix B, Table B.2; Appendix C for sampling strategy). For additional contacts and background, I cold-contacted and interviewed one state official per country with expertise in transnational party affairs, and three highly active social movement activists (one per country) met through fieldwork. In total, I conducted 62 semi-structured qualitative interviews (see Appendix B; Table B.3 for socio-demographic characteristics of the core sample).[6] Interviews were coded in multiple rounds to identify patterns and, subsequently major themes from my conceptual framework (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016). I used the five GIM dimensions as my primary codes and developed sub-codes inductively for refinement. Motivations were identified from interview narratives and treated as salient for party activism when they appeared consequential for respondents' participation and recurred consistently across interviews. To determine salient themes across respondent groups—Bolivians, Ecuadorians, Peruvians, and more or less transnationally active parties—I followed established guidelines in qualitative research, identifying a motivation "that (a) happens a number of times and (b) consistently happens in a specific way" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 248; see also Harding, 2013; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). This allowed me to identify "repetitive, regular, or consistent occurrences" indicating shared patterns across respondent groups (Saldaña, 2016, p. 5). Where possible, I triangulated interview data with event observations.

Table 1
Transnational party activity in Barcelona.

		Inter-election activity		
		None	**Moderate**	**Much**
Candidate Campaign Visits	**Yes**	UN CD, FE, PSC, SUMA,	CREO	MAS-IPSP MPAIS APRA
	No	FA, PNP, PPK, PPC	FP	

Note: Blue: Bolivia; Green: Ecuador; Red: Peru

I conducted 50 logged observations, covering events such as town hall meetings with country of origin politicians, party events, transnational elections, consulate events, street protests, and association events (see Appendix B; Table B.4). These observations substantially facilitated information access, contact generation, and rapport with interviewees.

Finally, I use three additional secondary data sources. First, I reviewed the Facebook pages of transnational party cells to examine party activities in Barcelona. Second, I analysed the CVs of 216 Peruvian candidates to assess emigrants' access to political careers. I focus on candidates from the six parties that in 2016 won seats in the Lima Metropolitan district, where emigrant votes are counted. The CVs, obtained from Peru's electoral commission webpage,[7] include study and employment histories abroad. I define emigrant candidates as those residing abroad during the 2015/16 (pre-)campaign period, excluding short-term stays. I validated each case through systematic background checks. Third, to capture the socio-cultural offer available to Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian migrants in Barcelona, I built an association census (see Appendix C).

[4] In the 2023 Ecuadorian elections, held after fieldwork, Ecuador also allowed online voting abroad to strengthen its diaspora relationship, though with substantial implementation failures (Ramírez Gallegos, 2025).

[5] APP (Peru) excluded because only an informal conversation with its representative was possible.

[6] Interviewees are identified in this article by name, country of origin, and/or party affiliation, depending on their consent. Pseudonyms, marked with an asterisk (*), are used for respondents who requested anonymity.

[7] https://consultalistacandidato.jne.gob.pe, accessed [May 2022].

4. Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian parties in Barcelona

Elections are important triggers for transnational party activity. In Barcelona, almost all the party chapters emerged prior to a national election. During electoral periods, parties invest in transnational outreach because they stand to gain the most, have more resources, and face demands from emigrants for a stronger party presence. Some party chapters emerged from bottom-up mobilisation, as activists proactively rallied for a party and subsequently sought recognition from the mainland headquarter. Examples include the Bolivian MAS-IPSP and the Peruvian PPK.

Much of the campaign activity is conducted informally, making it difficult to estimate parties' transnational outreach, and how it varies by party and across countries. However, looking at politicians' visits during elections and parties' activities after election day offers some insights (see Table 1). During (pre-)election time, some party chapters in Barcelona organise events to receive candidates or high-ranking party figures. Both Bolivian parties did so in the last election, while only APRA did among Peruvian parties. In contrast, all Ecuadorian parties held events in Barcelona for their extra-territorial or national candidates. Additionally, presidential candidates from MPAIS, CREO/SUMA, and CD flew in.

After election day, some parties stayed active abroad while others did not. Three activity types emerge. *No inter-election activity*: smaller, poorly institutionalized, or newcomer parties from Ecuador and Peru campaign abroad but often dissolve after failing to win. Some other parties maintain an official representation abroad but remain inactive until the next election. This includes Bolivia's UN, Peru's PPC and Ecuador's SUMA and PSC. *Moderate inter-election activity*: CREO and FP maintain their executive boards, and activists continue to meet infrequently. Rare ad-hoc activities may occur, such as internal board elections or visits by high-ranking party figure. *Much inter-election activity*: Bolivia's MAS-IPSP, Ecuador's MPAIS and Peru's APRA remain active all-year around, maintaining an executive board and meeting regularly. Activities vary in frequency and intensity. Beyond regular assemblies, frequent social events, and board elections, they may organise information campaigns and events with high-ranking party figures. MPAIS, MAS-IPSP and APRA also organise protest or lobby activities targeting their country of origin, Catalonia or Spain. In the past, MPAIS also organized a membership drive and working groups contributed policy input.

In sum, Ecuadorian parties were the most active ones during elections, and in each country one remained very active year-around. However, Ecuador's MPAIS was most consistently active, likely fuelled by MPAIS' strong rhetoric toward non-resident citizens and state outreach (Boccagni, 2014; Margheritis, 2011; Ramírez Gallegos, 2025). I will now turn to activists' motivations for transnational party activism and how they interlink with parties' inter-election presence in Barcelona.

5. Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian party activists in Barcelona

5.1. Political motivations

Political motivations for party activism emerged widely, relating to "homeland politics," "emigrant politics," or both.

5.1.1. Ecuador

In the Ecuadorian subsample, emigration to Spain in the late 1990s and early 2000s was a common trajectory. This occurred amid a proliferating economic crisis (Rosas & Gay, 2015). As one party activist put it: "We went into exile" (Carlos X.B.). In 2006, Rafael Correa founded MPAIS and won the presidency. The party actively sought to connect with emigrants, reflected in Correa's discursive and policy outreach to the diaspora (Boccagni, 2014; Margheritis, 2011; Pedroza & Palop-García, 2017) and a transnational party structure in Europe. Esteban Melo, a founder of MPAIS in Europe, recalls why he joined: "I could neither be an accomplice nor be passive towards the destruction of the country, so I had to participate. We must change things". Several Ecuadorian interviewees described this as an opportunity to help transform their country. The party's message of change and hope amid crisis strongly resonated with many of their interviewed activists. After 2006, MPAIS consistently won in Spain (Umpierrez de Reguero & Dandoy, 2020). Later, new parties like CREO also became vehicles for migrants seeking change: "For now, I think that CREO is the best opportunity to get there and change Ecuador" (Maria, vice president CREO Catalonia). However, the theme of change was particularly salient among MPAIS interviewees, likely due to MPAIS' strong transnational outreach.

Many of the interviewed Ecuadorian party activists also described transnational parties as vehicles for influencing emigrant politics. Three policy areas were particularly prominent: (1) economic policies, particularly state aid for migrant entrepreneurship, (2) transnational social services, especially repatriation support, and (3) state assistance with return migration. Ecuadorian interviewees have been especially vocal on emigrant rights, reflecting their parties' stronger presence abroad. Interviews show that activists also tend to assess whether parties deliver on their promises. Before the 2017 elections, five interviewees switched parties after becoming disillusioned with their parties' governing performance. Another two complained their party headquarter is unresponsive to their demands.

During inter-election periods, MPAIS sustained emigrants' involvement through policy information campaigns and working groups focused on migration policy. MPAIS emigrant MPs also regularly visited Barcelona. Although meetings are formally open, MPAIS activists' closer ties facilitates raising demands. MPAIS also collectively organises to support the host country's PSOE party election campaigns. CREO organises assemblies and prepares emigrant policy input for its party.

5.1.2. Peru

Peruvian immigration to Spain began in the mid 1990s and, similar to Ecuador, accelerated in the 2000s, driven primarily by economic factors (Rosas & Gay, 2015). Peru's democracy remains weakly institutionalized, with high-profile corruption cases posing a major problem (Levitsky et al., 2016). Since 2001, no president was re-elected. Consequently, many Peruvian interviewees had long abstained from party politics. However, new parties, like PNP in 2011, occasionally can offer a credible platform to emigrants seeking political change: "we had this hope … so I joined" (Fernando*, PNP). The party failed to deliver on its promises, and for the 2016 election, "all the people who were with PNP, a lot of people switched to FA", explained one activist (Fernando, PNP). Other emigrants also joined, stating "we saw that it was a favourable alternative for Peru" (party activist, FA). Supporters raised money and collected signatures from Peruvians in Barcelona, helping to formally register the movement as a political party in Peru.

Preventing a candidate's victory can also motivate activism. Isabela* had experienced Alberto Fujimori's authoritarian regime and was determined to stop his daughter, Keiko Fujimori, from winning the elections, and so she volunteered as an election day poll watcher for a rival party. Ultimately, the election was won by *Peruanos Para el Kambio* (PPK)—a name that translates to "Peruvians for Change" and, notably, shares the initials of its leader, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski. In Barcelona, the party's appeal encouraged a group of activists to independently launch a campaign for PPK, contacting the party headquarter for official recognition. "We want the destiny of Peru to change", Wilmer, the Barcelona cell leader, stated.

Regarding diaspora policy demands, respondents highlighted the need for better consulate services, a return assistance program, and a diaspora investment scheme. However, their party activism remained primarily focused on the country of origin. An exception are APRA party activists who during inter-election times, beyond assemblies focused on

Peruvian politics, participate collectively in Spanish PSOE's activities and protests. They also lobbied to name a Barcelona square after their party founder, Victor Raul Haya de la Torre.

5.1.3. Bolivia

Bolivian narratives have been more mixed. While UN activists expressed a desire to foster change, activists from the ruling party, MAS-IPSP, did not. MAS-IPSP came to power in 2005 after a party system collapse. Subsequent electoral programs included promises to protect Bolivians abroad. Many emigrated in the early 2000s to Spain, primarily for better economic opportunities (Rosas & Gay, 2015). In Barcelona, a group of MAS-IPSP supporters started organizing for the 2009 elections and, through the consulate, requested official recognition from the party in Bolivia. As Fabian, a MAS-IPSP activist, explained, "There is no other Bolivian organization solely dedicated to defending the rights of all Bolivians". MAS-IPSP interviewees expressed a desire to contribute to Bolivia, but they did not talk about change.

In contrast, emigrants from the opposition party, UN, sought change by removing MAS-IPSP from power and preserving Bolivia's ongoing democratisation. One activist stated he joined "to confront this resurgence [of MAS-IPSP] which from the start had a populist and totalitarian tendency" (Walter, UN). Campaign volunteers approached emigrants, proclaiming "We were the change that could stop the governing party", recalls Ariel, the general secretary of UN in Barcelona.

Like their Ecuadorian and Peruvian counterparts, Bolivian party activists sought to improve consulate services. A MAS-IPSP activist claimed their lobbying brought gradual improvements. Although hard to verify, this reflects their belief that party activism can improve emigrants' lives. Nevertheless, MAS-IPSP activists also expressed frustration that their party headquarter was often unresponsive to their demands. Opposition activists demanded the right for emigrants to elect their consul, underscoring the importance they place on addressing citizens' needs abroad.

Between elections, MAS-IPSP activists discuss Bolivian politics in assemblies, collectively participate in labour and anti-racism protests and in the host country party Podemos' election campaigns. As in the Ecuadorian MPAIS and Peruvian APRA, these activities show how emigrants use parties with a sustained transnational presence for multiple political purposes.

5.2. Emotional motivations

Why do emigrants remain politically invested in a country they have left, often years ago? I highlight identification with prominent party figures, patriotism, and altruism as important motivations.

5.2.1. Ecuador

Party figures are central to creating and sustaining emotional party attachments. CREO activists mentioned Guillermo Lasso (Ecuador), while several others cited emigrant candidates from CD, MPAIS, PSC, and SUMA, underscoring how extra-territorial electoral system foster identification. MPAIS activists frequently mentioned their party leader and former president Rafael Correa, whose populist discourse resonates strongly abroad (see also Jakobson et al., 2023). During a non-electoral phase of my fieldwork, around 250 spectators attended his event in Barcelona, many wearing shirts with his image, carrying campaign posters, and waving Ecuadorian flags. Correa addressed them as exiles of former governments and heroes who saved the country through remittances. The crowd repeatedly chanted "We love Correa".

Patriotic motivations were a prominent theme in Ecuadorian interview narratives. As one put it: "all the political work we do is patriotic" (Nilo, MPAIS). Altruism also mattered, with respondents stating: "Our duty is to work for the people" (Kevin, PSC), wanting to "help others" (Saul, SUMA), or "improve society" (Luis, party activist). Unlike patriotic narratives, these statements avoid explicit references to the country of origin state.

5.2.2. Bolivia

All interviewed MAS-IPSP activists cited party leader and then president Evo Morales as a key motivation for their activism. At the Barcelona branch, a recurring inter-election event was Morales' birthday celebration, featuring a cake bearing his image. At another event in 2018, partly organized by the consulate, some attendees carried a Bolivian flag and an Evo Morales banner. In contrast, UN did not hold such events and interviewees never mentioned their long-time party leader, Samuel Dora Medina, as a motivation for involvement. Some interviewees reported patriotic or altruistic motivations, stating, for example "we are at our country's disposal", wanting to "help the people" (Diego*, party activist), or that it is "our obligation to try and participate" (Fabian, party activist). However, these motivations did not emerge in UN interviews.

5.2.3. Peru

In the Peruvian subsample, several party activists identified with Alberto Fujimori (FP), Alan García (APRA), Lourdes Flores (PPC), and local party branch leaders (FA, PNP, APRA). These attachments can be deep. For example, during a non-electoral phase of my fieldwork, the Barcelona APRA chapter held a commemorative mass for its leader Alan García and two-time president, who had just died. Two interviewed APRA activists had been involved in the party before emigrating, forming a strong partisan identity that made activism integral to daily life and self-conception. The majority of Peruvians in Barcelona come from the Coastal region, 78.31 per cent in 2007 (Reher & Requena, 2009). The region, particularly Trujillo, is an electoral stronghold for APRA. In many fieldwork conversations, interlocutors attributed APRA's strong presence in Barcelona to the Trujillo-Barcelona migration corridor. During non-electoral times, high-ranking party figures occasionally visit which may reinforce APRA activists' emotional ties.

Some interviewees also invoked patriotic motivations saying "It was our initiative to contribute to the wellbeing of the country" (Wilmer, party activist). During an election campaign, FA activists opposing Keiko Fujimori staged a public *lavado de bandera*, symbolically cleansing their country from corruption. Altruistic motives emerged in three interviews.

Finally, 35 of the 36 interviewed Peruvian, Bolivian, and Peruvian activists were foreign-born. One third had been active in a party before emigrating, likely strengthening their emotional country of origin connection. However, because parties in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador frequently collapse (Levitsky et al., 2016), migrants usually join new parties abroad. Recruiting second generation migrants remains difficult, as they often lack strong political connection to their parents' origin country. Participant observations revealed that younger migrants rarely attended party events but frequently joined cultural dance activities.

5.3. Career motivations

Transnationally, three career paths exist: paid posts upon return, candidacy roles, and administrative posts abroad (e.g. consulates). Since positions on transnational party executive boards in the cases studied are unpaid, I exclude them and focus on paid post upon return and candidacies, the most common paths mentioned in interviews.

5.3.1. Ecuador

Electoral systems shape emigrants' access to candidacy positions. Ecuadorians in Europe, Asia and Oceania can run for two parliamentary seats reserved for emigrants. These positions are highly coveted: "It is everyone's dream to become a MP" (Manel, party activist). Party activism, especially in parties remaining active between elections, is often seen as a political career stepping stone because, as Lorena, a party activist, explained, "if you demonstrate that you are working [for the party], you could become a future candidate". Among the 20 interviewed Ecuadorian activists, 15 aspired to run for office at some point. Elected candidates must return to Ecuador to assume office, visiting their constituency only occasionally. My data do not allow a clear

assessment of whether the prospect of return additionally encouraged or deterred candidacy desires; interviewees did not present it as an obstacle. Yet internal candidate selection processes are unfavourable, as they are opaque and characterized by top-down decision-making. Only CREO organised binding primaries abroad. Six MPAIS activists—not the two MPs—expressed frustration that, despite sustained inter-election involvement, they had no say. Moreover, parties often use emigrant candidacy slots to co-opt unaffiliated leaders of prominent migrant associations (Fliess, 2021). Sometimes senior party figures travelled from Ecuador to persuade them. After elections, several parties discontinue their transnational presence and some cut contact with activists altogether, leaving them feeling the party had, as two activists put it, "simply used" them.

Aspirations for paid party or public-sector positions upon return were less commonly expressed by interviewees. One was promised a mayoral candidacy, another a personal assistant role if their candidate won, and a third returned to Ecuador to pursue a position but failed and returned. Fieldwork suggests that while some activists expect a paid post in return, these rarely materialise. Sonia, a MPAIS activist stated: "that's what annoys me, and I think others too. When they [parties] offer them [positions], it means nothing".

5.3.2. Bolivia

In Bolivia, the constitution requires national assembly candidates to have permanently resided in the country for the two years preceding the election (Art. 149). In practice, emigrants cannot run for office, making Bolivian parties less appealing to career-oriented activists. While some still hoped to secure a political post in Bolivia, such ambitions were not prominent in interviewees' accounts. This may be because, as in Ecuador, parties rarely deliver. This dynamic is illustrated by Nestor, an activist for the ruling party MAS-IPSP: "I went too [to Bolivia], and I returned again to Spain since the MAS government did not have much capacity". When such hopes fade, resentment may follow: "[party activism] not in this life anymore. I have actually given time, money and all they do is to kick my butt" (Severino, MAS-IPSP).

5.3.3. Peru

Peruvian emigrants can become candidates from abroad but, unlike in Ecuador, do not compete in an extra-territorial district. Instead, they contest inland districts, usually the Lima Metropolitan district, where emigrant votes are counted. The analysis of candidate CVs reveals that only six non-resident candidates (2.78 per cent) ran in total, none based in Spain (see Table 2). Only two interviewees explicitly aspired to run for office. The weak organisational structure of Peruvian party branches in Barcelona, including parties with a permanent presence such as APRA and FP, limits activists' ability to lobby party headquarters in Peru effectively. Although three activists reported close transnational ties to high-level party figures, personal connections alone seem insufficient. Likely, parties see little political advantage to nominate candidates from Spain. By contrast, the stronger presence of US-based candidates could suggest better-organised branches and greater incentives for headquarters to strengthen their US presence, possibly making career ambitions more salient there. Nonetheless, low list placements indicate that emigrants face challenges there too. As in Ecuador, successful candidates are expected to relocate to Peru to fulfil their mandate. One aspirant for a candidacy criticised this arrangement, but it did not discourage his desire to postulate.

Beyond candidacy, activists may seek paid posts upon return, which often become available following Peru's frequent changes of government. However, as in Bolivia and Ecuador, Peruvian parties seem largely unreceptive to demands from abroad, creating disillusionment.

> They [from the PPK] thought I came [to Peru] for a party post … There were some [emigrant party activists] from Argentina, Germany, England, and from all over the world … At least they wanted to greet the president, but he did not provide any opportunity to do so.
>
> Wilmer, party activist (PPK)

Like Nestor (Bolivia) and one Ecuadorian activist, Wilmer was unsuccessful and eventually returned to Spain.

5.4. Socialising motivations

Transnational parties can offer emigrants opportunities to socialise with co-nationals. Four social event forms exist: casual lunches or dinners, visits by politicians, public holiday celebrations, and party-specific commemorations. During campaigns, nearly all party cells organise social meals to raise funds and "attract and engage people" (Ariel, UN). Interviewed activists often first became involved through personal contacts, and social events could help deepen these ties. During inter-election periods, only MPAIS and CREO (Ecuador), MAS-IPSP (Bolivia), and APRA (Peru), organise the other event types, which contribute to group identity formation and friendships. However, their capacity to attract new recruits is constrained, as they compete with Barcelona's numerous migrant associations. During fieldwork, 34 Ecuadorian, 53 Bolivian, 50 Peruvian associations, along with several federations, were active in Barcelona, amounting to 1.6 (Ecuador), 2.2 (Bolivia) and 2.4 (Peru) organisations per 1000 migrants. Three quarters of the activist sample were active in at least one such association.

5.4.1. Ecuador

During elections, emigrant candidates and other party figures visit Barcelona. Afterward, both MPs representing the Europe, Asia and Oceania district regularly return. These visits also serve socialising functions. For example, at one event, Latin music played following the official programme as attendees chatted, ate homemade Ecuadorian corn pie, and danced. During two other MP visits, a smaller group later dined together. Unlike MPAIS, CREO has no emigrant MP, limiting its capacity to organise such events. Instead, party activists regularly meet to discuss politics, sporadically receiving party figures. Beyond political

Table 2
Emigrant candidates in the 2016 Peruvian Congress elections.

Political Party	Name	Residency Place	List number/seats won/ total seats constituency
Fuerza Popular	Francisco Petrozzi (e)	Germany	15/15/36
	Jaime Verástegui	USA	23/15/36
Peruanos Por el Kambio	Mercedes Araoz (e)	Mexico	01/10/36
Accion Popular	Julia Panta Quevedo	USA	35/03/36
Frente Amplio	Martina Portocarrero	Switzerland	04/03/36
Alianza Para el Progreso	Luis Olazabal Conde	USA	21/02/36
Alianza Popular	no emigrant candidates	-	-/03/36

Note: Author's own elaboration. (e) = elected. Source: Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (JNE).

visits, MPAIS celebrates Mother's Day and Father's Day to "not lose contact with the people" (Nilo, MPAIS). A grassroot support group also commemorates the 2010 attack on MPAIS' founder Rafael Correa and celebrates his birthday. Several MPAIS activists described forming friendships over time, whereas such accounts appeared less frequently among interviewees from parties with more limited overseas presence. While five Ecuadorian interviewees noted that activism allowed them to meet new people, none described this as a motivation for their activism.

5.4.2. Bolivia

Unlike in Ecuador, Bolivia's electoral system does not incentivize parties to strengthen ties with emigrants in Barcelona, so politicians rarely visit. Nonetheless, MAS-IPSP organises social events for Mother's Day and All Saints' Day. A recurring party-specific commemorative event is president Evo Morales' birthday. The MAS-IPSP cell decorates its office, and a birthday cake, topped with blue icing (the party's colour) and a photo of Morales, bears the message: "Happy birthday, brother Evo. From MAS-IPSP Barcelona, Spain." While socialising was not a prominent theme in interview narratives, Facebook posts show these events as spaces to mingle and connect with the country of origin.

5.4.3. Peru

Peruvian politicians rarely visit Barcelona, and after election day, only APRA organises events. They regularly celebrated the party's history and leaders. They also celebrated the birthday of their founder, with prominent figures from Peru attending in the past. During fieldwork, APRA held a memorial mass for its deceased leader Alan García, followed by lunch in a nearby Peruvian restaurant. The party cell also met to mourn a recently deceased party activist. These examples demonstrate the strong social bonds among APRA activists abroad. Over time, several APRA activists reported building lasting friendships by meeting like-minded people, sometimes already known before emigration, at party events. As one activist puts it, "later, after 20 years, well these relationships have solidified (Carlos N.). However, beyond APRA, socialising motivations only emerged in one other Peruvian interview.

5.5. Resource constrains

Limited resources by both emigrants and parties constrain transnational party activism across all three cases.

5.5.1. Ecuador

Ecuadorian parties typically cover campaign material costs but, with two exceptions in 2013, have not transferred funds abroad. Party activists—most of whom in my sample are highly educated and all of whom hold dual citizenship—are expected to self-finance party activities.

> To organize a car, put the petrol, buy the thing to tape the posters, buy a sandwich, a Coca-Cola, a water … Everything, all that is paid for by us. So, there wasn't any economic support [from the party].
>
> Guillermo, party activist (MPAIS)

To remain attractive, party chapters do not charge membership fees, a practice also common among Bolivian and Peruvian branches. MPAIS was the only Ecuadorian party with its own office in Barcelona, open year-round and financed by committed, high-earning activists. The chapter received funding for inter-election activities only once to organise a membership drive. Beyond financial contributions, activism also requires significant time investment, creating barriers to participation and recruitment as well as frustration amongst activists, especially for those with demanding work and family responsibilities, as interview narratives reveal.

Aspirants for a candidacy face additional barriers. Most parties expect them to self-finance their campaigns. One reported to have spent 30,000€, explaining "it is like you go to eat in a restaurant, you pay for the food yourself" (Maria, candidate CREO).

5.5.2. Bolivia

In the most recent elections, only UN received material and financial support from Bolivia, which its spokesperson deemed essential for campaigning and renting a temporary office space. Despite this, volunteers' individual contributions remained crucial and were "expected". By contrast, MAS-IPSP received some campaign material but no financial support, making self-financing central. None of the Bolivian, Ecuadorian, or Peruvian parties maintain paid staff abroad, shifting the full burden onto volunteers. Here, high-status individuals can make a difference. For example, MAS-IPSP uses a restaurant as its headquarters at no cost because it is run by the party's representative. However, interviewees consistently expressed frustration linked to recruitment difficulties, noting potential recruits often face resource constraints: "For these things you need to have time … the work drains you. As I am free [self-employed], I can do it" (Severino, MAS-IPSP).

As in Ecuador, most activists in the Bolivian subsample have a university degree, and almost all hold dual citizenship. After election day, resource constrains continue to shape MAS-IPSP's transnational party activism, which remains self-funded.

5.5.3. Peru

Funding data is available for four of the six Peruvian parties active in Barcelona during the last elections and shows that all relied on volunteers and donations. Interviewees expressed frustration over this, echoing sentiments voiced by Bolivian and Ecuadorian activists. Despite their crucial contributions, they felt unrecognized by party headquarters.

> They don't give you even a single dime [laughs] … for them, we're just a handful of people who don't represent anything.
>
> Carlos N., party activist (APRA)

The leader of PPK disclosed that he and another activist privately funded their Barcelona campaign with 18,000€. Although difficult to verify, this illustrates the financial burden placed on activists. For meeting spaces some parties leverage connections. For example, PKK used a hotel through a friend, while APRA operated from a migrant association's office, led by its party leader. Like Ecuadorian and Bolivian interviewees, the Peruvian respondents tended to be highly educated, and almost all held dual citizenship.

As in Ecuador, Peruvian candidates must self-finance their campaigns. This burden likely contributes to the rarity of candidates from Spain. Lacking an extra-territorial representation system like Ecuador's, they must compete with candidates in Peru, facing high risks of electoral defeat and financial loss.

6. Discussion

Which motivations for emigrant party activism emerged across interviews, countries, and parties? The desire to influence country of origin politics and emigrant policies emerged as a salient theme. Domestic crises spurred transnational activism when activists believed a party could credibly deliver change. While half of the sample sought to improve both domestic politics and emigrants' situation abroad, Ecuadorians often prioritized emigrant policy demands within this broader motivational dimension. Ecuador's stronger diaspora policy commitment, along with extra-territorial representation (Palop-García & Pedroza, 2021; Pedroza & Palop-García, 2017), facilitates such demands. Peruvian interviewees primarily focused on domestic politics. Their electoral system offers weak incentives for parties to expand transnationally, making them less attractive to activists seeking improved diaspora policy. An exception is APRA, Peru's transnationally most active party, whose activists voiced emigrant demands prominently in interviews. This pattern extends to highly active parties from Bolivia (MAS-PSP) and Ecuador (MPAIS), suggesting a stronger transnational party presence attracts individuals with more varied political motivations. Finally, in three interviews political motivations were not

salient, and career or altruistic motivations surfaced instead.

Emotional attachments also mattered. Consistent with Latin America's personalized politics (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013), identification with party figures frequently emerged across all three countries and nearly all parties, though not all respondents. Party leader identification alone, however, was insufficient to generate activism abroad, as other, especially political motivations were simultaneously present. Altruistic and patriotic motives appeared across all three cases without party-specific patterns. Ecuadorian interviewees often exhibited various emotions at once. Emigration, framed as a tragic consequence of economic crisis (Boccagni, 2014, p. 126), may have fostered patriotic and altruistic motivations. Ecuador's electoral system also encourages visits from party figures, providing opportunities for leader identification. Peruvian APRA activists can sustain emotional ties to their country of origin localities due to specific migration patterns, a dynamic not found among other Peruvian, Ecuadorian and Bolivian interviewees, where even those with prior party experience typically joined new parties abroad, as their former ones had dissolved.

Political career ambitions were more prominent in Ecuadorian interview narratives than in Bolivian and Peruvian ones. Patronage and clientelism, prevalent in Latin American domestic politics (Stokes et al., 2013), also shape transnational politics, though unevenly across electoral systems. Ecuador's extra-territorial constituency encourages parties to field non-resident candidates, making all Ecuadorian parties—even those with transnationally weak structures—particularly attractive for political careerists. Peru permits emigrant candidates but, lacking a dedicated constituency, parties have little incentive to nominate them, especially in Spain, where demand and party institutionalization are low. Consequently, Peruvian activists seldom reported seeking candidacies. Bolivia prohibits emigrant candidacies, yet some interviewees articulated a hope for political roles upon return. This aspiration also appeared in four Ecuadorian and Peruvian interviews. However, parties in Barcelona rarely facilitate political careers, creating disillusionment.

Nearly all parties offer opportunities for socialising. Although first-generation migrants may face challenges integrating socially, even in a shared-language setting due to cultural hurdles, and parties often recruit through friendship ties, socialising motivations were not a prominent theme in narratives. Possibly, Barcelona's numerous socio-cultural migrant organisations—where many interviewees are also active—provide multiple alternatives for socialising. Additionally, interviewee trajectories show that, transnational party activism began, on average, only after 11 years in Barcelona, suggesting that party activism often followed long-term settlement. Still, party events help retain existing activists, and those involved in transnationally highly active parties like MPAIS, MAS-IPSP, and APRA form a group identity and often lasting friendships, making socialising motivations conditionally salient.

Some Ecuadorian parties but only one Bolivian and no Peruvian party cell fund their branches abroad. Ecuador's more inclusive electoral system seems to encourage some funding, yet party cells still struggle economically. My sample, which largely consists of migrants with relatively high socio-economic status, suggests high-intensity activism then is most feasible for those with the time and money to sustain it. Transnational party activism then may be limited to migrants who succeeded to maintain their high country of origin socio-economic status or those experiencing social upward mobility abroad.

The analysis also showed that, in my sample, activists in transnationally more active parties—those that maintain organisational structures, regular activities, and host visiting politicians beyond election periods—tend to report a broader range of motivations. This motivational pattern is subtle but noticeable in the career, emotional and socialising dimensions and is largely due to the transnationally more active Ecuadorian parties. Their outreach, incentivised by an electoral system with extra-territorial representation, helps foster career ambitions, party figure identification and attracts activists with altruistic and patriotic motivations. Additionally, these parties maintain social hubs beyond election day, strengthening group identity and enabling lasting friendships.

Across sub-samples, activists also expressed disillusionment rooted in resource constraints and political and career motivations. Politically, dissatisfaction with party performance prompted party switching among some Ecuadorian and Peruvian activists, while some Bolivian MAS-IPSP interviewees criticised their headquarters' unresponsiveness to their demands. Among Ecuadorian interviewees, frustration also rose when parties abandoned them after election day. Career-related frustrations surfaced among activists who felt overlooked for posts, with MPAIS interviewees additionally resenting the absence of primaries. Across the cases studied, resource constraints and a perceived lack of recognition from party headquarters frustrated activists.

7. Conclusion

Political parties, particularly in developing democracies, increasingly mobilise emigrant support (Bermúdez, 2016; Burgess & Tyburski, 2020; Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2020; Levitt, 2001; Umpierrez de Reguero & Dandoy, 2023). This study examined the motivations of their activists abroad, focusing on Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian high-intensity party activists in Spain.

This article demonstrates that party activism among Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian emigrants is broadly consistent with motivational patterns identified in research on domestic activism in Latin America and the General Incentive Model (GIM) (e.g., Muñoz-Armenta et al., 2013; Pérez et al., 2020; Piñeiro & Rosenblatt, 2017; Ribeiro & Do Amaral, 2019; Webb et al., 2020; Whiteley & Seyd, 2002). Interviewees expressed political, emotional, and—more selectively—career and socialising motivations, while facing substantial resource constraints. Migration reshaped the content of these motivations. Transnationally, political motivations often extended to emigrant policy issues. Emotional attachments went beyond leader identification and were also frequently expressed through patriotic sentiments. Career motivations were especially pronounced where the transnational electoral system incentivised non-resident candidacies. Socialising motivations were less salient in activists' accounts, reflecting domestic patterns, but a stronger transnational party presence may amplify them. Resource constraints persisted and intensified abroad, because party headquarters rarely commit financially. These findings, largely aligning with the theoretical expectations, suggest the GIM is applicable to Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian emigrant party activists, while migration, transnational parties, and electoral systems subtly yet systematically reconfigure when these motivations become salient and how they operate abroad. Together, these findings help explain why emigrants invest time and resources in a transnational party despite no direct material benefits.

This study also contributes to theoretical debates on transnational politics. It extends research focused on activists from advanced democracies by showing that political and emotional motivations (Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021; Dain, 2025; Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2025; Siotos, 2020) and resource constraints (e.g., Ahmadov & Sasse, 2016), are also salient in the narratives of Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian activists abroad, while refining how these dimensions operate abroad. For example, concerning political motivations the prominent role of particular emigrant policies became more visible—a finding likely transferable to other Latin American countries, where diaspora policy outreach is common and state-diaspora relationships are benevolent. The study also shows some interviewees sought to prevent democratic backsliding in their country of origin. Since fieldwork, political crises intensified in all three countries, possibly further shaping political motivations among activists abroad, which future research could explore.

Results also diverge from previous studies. While career motivations emerged, particularly within Ecuadorian narratives, they hardly matter for British party activists abroad (Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021), possibly because the UK lacks special emigrant representation, which in

Ecuador appears to amplify career motivations. We can thus expect career motivations to generally play a more prominent role in countries with such systems (e.g., Dominican Republic). Socialising motivations appear more salient among emigrant activists from the UK, as respondents lacked residence country language proficiency (Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021), and may have fewer alternative venues for socialising (e.g., socio-cultural migrant associations). As host country contexts shape transnational party activism, future research should study Bolivian, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, and other Latin American activists in non-native language settings, where socialising motivations may generally appear more salient. Moreover, this study shows that while interviewed activists believed their involvement matters, many also reported frustration linked to resource constraints and, sometimes, to unfulfilled political and career promises.

Finally, this study highlights how party activism and transnational party outreach are linked, as interviewed activists from transnationally more active parties reported, in accordance with the theoretical expectations, a broader mix of motivations. Electoral systems with special emigrant representation, like Ecuador's, incentivize transnational party activism, which suggests that state-led diaspora inclusion (Collyer, 2014; Gamlen, 2008; Ragazzi, 2014) can be effective. Likely, similar motivational patterns emerge in other countries with strong state-diaspora relationships, like the Dominican Republic or Mexico (Palop-García & Pedroza, 2021). To further generalise and refine our understandings of transnational party activism more comparative work would be desirable, ideally studies that include both developing and advanced democracies.

Data statement

Research data are not shared to protect the research participants.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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Data availability

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