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Party expats? Mapping transnational party branches of French, German and UK parties

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Abstract

Today many parties interact with members and supporters outside their national borders. One way parties do so is by establishing transnational party branches. However so far, there is a lack of theoretical and empirical research exploring this transnational aspect of party activity. This paper provides a first insight into why parties develop transnational branches, and how it affects their organization. It argues that the development of party branches abroad differs across countries due to the incentives provided by the national legal framework on voting and donations from abroad. In turn, the role and functions of the transnational branches vary depending on this legal framework. Looking at the two transnational branches of the two mainstream parties in France, Germany and the United Kingdom, this paper first briefly outlines the different national legal frameworks and the scope and size of transnational party branches. It then focuses on how they are organized, their role and function, and how this shapes their relationship to their homeland party. This explorative research is mainly based on legal and secondary data. The paper finds that the parties studied differ substantially in location, number and membership size for their transnational branches. Furthermore, the organizational links and the control by the national party over transnational party branches is the highest where parties have the most to gain in terms of votes in national elections and donations.

Keywords: Transnationalism, Political parties, Party organizational linkage, Party membership, Comparative case study

Introduction

Since the rapid expansion of voting rights for citizens abroad in their home country (Hutcheson and Arrighi 2015; Lafleur 2013) many parties started to interact with members and supporters outside their national borders. One way parties do so is by establishing transnational party branches, which are more or less formally recognized by the homeland party. Despite recent scholarly interest in this subject (Burgess 2018; Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei 2019; Paarlberg 2017; Dark III 2003; Kernalegenn and van Haute 2020; Rashkova and van der Staak 2020a) there is a continuous lack of theoretical and empirical research exploring this transnational aspect of party activity.

While we know more of why parties develop transnational branches, we know little on how parties organize abroad and the reasons for a specific organizational model.



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This comparative exploratory paper further contributes to address this gap by mapping the diverse and varying organizational types and relationships between national homeland parties and their transnational branches. In order to do so, the paper covers parties that face very different legal and party specific incentives to established transnational branches in the first place. However, it is not the central aim of the paper to explain why transnational branches are established but how. Yet, the discussion of different legal and party specific incentives is needed to gain further insight to what extent diverse and varying types and relationships between homeland parties and their transnational branches are shaped by them. Our study adapts Poguntke's classification (2000) of four types of collateral organizations in addition to the traditional party membership organization, each of them with different characteristics along four key aspects: (1) the official role of transnational party branches, (2) who can join them and how, (3) their influence on intra-party decision-making processes and (4) the level of control of transnational party branches by the national party. The central contribution of this paper to the study of parties abroad is therefore the overall comparative approach and systematic application of Poguntke's theoretical model to study the type of formal organizational relationship between transnational party branches and their national homeland party. Furthermore, this paper supplies further support for the argument that one of the central reasons of variation on these aspects across parties and countries are the incentives provided by the national legal framework on voting and donations from abroad, which parties can use strategically to further advance their three main party goals of vote maximization, policy implementation, and office seeking (Müller and Strøm 1999). Overall, the paper contributes to the comparative study of transnational party branches by offering insight as to how and, to some degree, why transnational party branches are established.

This paper aims to address these questions by mapping the universe of transnational party branches for the two mainstream parties in France (*The Republicans, LR* and *Socialist Party, PS*), Germany (*Christian Democratic Union of Germany, CDU* and *Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD*) and the United Kingdom (*Conservative Party, CON* and *Labour Party, LAB*). It starts with a very short discussion of the growing literature on extra-territorial politics with a focus on transnational elections and external voting. Next the paper offers a brief overview of the formal national laws regulating international party members' and citizens' ability to act as voters and donors abroad (Nassmacher 2009; Poptcheva 2015) in the cases selected here. It then provides a first insight into the scope and size of transnational party branches before analyzing parties' transnational organizational response to its legal environment. It finds that the parties studied here differ substantially across cases and countries in size and scope of their transnational branches and internal organization and link to their homeland party. This highlights the fact that the same legal opportunity structure does not always result in the same party organizational set up. The paper finds 'ancillary organizations' displaying a formal organizational links with very high control by the national party over transnational branches are the most frequent type of collateral organizations found here in both French parties and Labour, followed by affiliated type organizations in Germany. Finally, the Conservatives transnational branches resemble an independent collateral organization. Thus, mostly national party links to and control over transnational branches is the highest where parties have the most to gain from them in

terms of votes and donations. The study of transnational party branches is important as organized branches abroad can help parties to address issues such as lack of information on external voters for electoral campaigns or even address party membership's decline at home.

Extra-territorial politics, elections and parties

Since 1960s, one can observe a rapid growth in legislations enabling citizens to cast a ballot from abroad (Hutcheson and Arrighi 2015; Lafleur 2013). The literature stresses both normative (Lopez-Guerra 2005) and party strategic considerations (Hutcheson and Arrighi 2015; Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei 2019) for this expansion. The latter highlights that citizen abroad are an untapped electoral resource that could affect elections. Here, Hutcheson and Arrighi (2015) identify a variety of institutional constraints (limits on who can vote, difficult access to the ballot and modes of representation of external voters) that limit the potential electoral impact of external voting in national elections in Europe. This leads Arrighi and Bauböck (2017) to argue that what we can observe is a pattern of franchise 'expansion' and 'containment' to keep the 'Pandora's box' of unexpected electoral consequences remains half-shut (Hutcheson and Arrighi 2015). It seems that states prefer to adopt this strategy as electoral behavior of expatriates is mainly unknown and unpredictable (Caramani and Grotz 2015; Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei 2019). For example, the case of Romania in 2009 (Burean 2011) or in Italy in 2006 (Laguerre 2013) show that emigrant voters can influence the outcome of election but not always in the way intended by the actors that pushed for the right of external voting. Political parties' development of transnational organizational networks and thus higher level of engagement with citizens abroad (van Haute and Kernalegenn 2021) is one way to overcome this information gap. Despite the big role party organization could play here, we still know very little about the organizational response by parties to external voting rights regulations (for some recent exceptions see Burgess 2018; Kernalegenn and van Haute 2020; Rashkova and van der Staak 2020a). Existing work also often focuses mainly on campaign activities and less on internal party organizational aspects (Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei 2019). While such studies make an important contribution to understand how parties capitalize on electoral competitive advantage through the mobilization of voters abroad, it reveals little about the actual internal functioning of party branches abroad and how this can affect mobilization efforts during elections and between them. Paarlberg (2017, pp. 12–13) stresses the need to study how parties engage with citizens abroad beyond political campaigns and explore to what extent parties develop institutionalized, mass-based structures abroad as these additional organizational links are part of a larger or even alternative area of transnational political engagement by parties instead of external voting. However, beyond the three Latin American cases analyzed by Paarlberg (2017) we, for now, know very little about these aspects of party organization in relation to its transnational party branches.

This paper aims to contribute to this growing literature on intensity and nature of party activities abroad. It first includes home country rules related to donations from abroad as another way of external citizens' political engagement with politics at home. Second, it will outline the scope and size of party branches abroad and how they are regulated for six parties in three European countries. Do we find that branches at home and abroad are regulated similarly or does it echo the "Pandora's box half shut"

situation outlined by Hutcheson and Arrighi (2015) where transnational branches do exist but their roles are constrained? The paper also asks if scope, size and nature of the party abroad is mainly due to home country legal incentives or also due to the party's specific perspective of the role and importance of their transnational branches.

It is important to stress here that the development of parties abroad does not only depend on the home country but also the host countries legal context (Zederman 2020) that might prohibit parties to register, operate or limit its activities such as in Canada (Lafleur 2013), Slovenia, Poland or Luxembourg (Rashkova and van der Staak 2020b). However, parties usually do not fight these restrictions, and instead choose to operate in an alternative form (e.g. informal friendship groups) or not at all (van der Staak 2018; Uekami et al. 2020).

Data and methods

Following Seawright and Gerring (2008, p. 297), the paper uses the diverse case selection technique. This means all cases exemplify diversity across key factors that affect the development and nature of party branches abroad. Seawright and Gerring (2008, p. 297) point out that such a case selection is ideal for exploratory case study research, as 'diverse cases are likely to be representative in the minimal sense of representing the full variation of the population'. However, it may not mirror the distribution of that variation in the population. This paper focuses on western European stable democracies and on the "emigrant party branches" type of the party abroad (Kernalegenn and van Haute 2020, p. 239). Further, in all three cases, external voting is allowed. However, the cases differ in a variety of aspects such as the electoral system. While both France and the UK have a more majoritarian system, Germany has a proportional representation electoral system. This is relevant as far as countries with majoritarian systems create fewer incentives to develop parties abroad than countries with a PR system (Kernalegenn and van Haute 2020). Further, the two majoritarian systems differ further as France is one of the few European cases with extra-territorial constituencies (see also Romania, Macedonia, Italy, Portugal and Croatia) and the UK not (Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei 2019). In the UK and Germany, expatriate votes are dispersed through assimilation at the sub-national level based on biographical ties (Hutcheson and Arrighi 2015). The cases selected here also differ as they have very different sizes of emigrant populations as a percentage of all citizens, with the UK having substantially larger numbers of citizens abroad, followed by Germany and then France (Hutcheson and Arrighi 2015). Besides these, specific party factors such as party age, size and ideology might also affect parties' strategy regarding branches abroad. Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei (2019) highlight that mainstream parties are more likely to set up infrastructure abroad and Joppke (2003, pp. 431–432) finds that the political right seems to be more motivated to build up links with expatriates. Therefore, this paper focuses on the historically two mainstream left and right wing parties in each country. This paper acknowledges that these additional variables might affect in some way why and how transnational party outreach is established. However, based on the classical party politics literature, the three main party goals are vote maximization, policy implementation, and office seeking (Müller and Strøm 1999). Thus, the organization and link to their branches abroad should be most affected by regulations that enable parties to achieve these goals, i.e. rules to vote and donate from abroad. Consequently, the countries chosen here substantially differ in

Table 1 Overview of national laws on voting in national elections and donates from abroad

Country	Activity	National law	Legal incentive for transnational party branches
UK	External Vote	Yes, since 1985 (15 years limit)	low
	Donate	Yes, with some rules and very low limits: - no limits for individuals on the electoral register in the UK (excludes Channel Islands, the Isle of Man) -Foreigners and individuals not on the electoral register limited to below £50 for individual candidate and below £500 to political parties + permits financial support for international travel, accommodation or subsistence by party officers/staff within 'reasonable' amounts	low
Germany	External Vote	Yes, since 1985, (with 25 years and other limits)	medium
	Donate	Yes, overall with very lenient rules for both individuals and companies but low limit of 1000€ for non-EU donations	high
France	External Vote	Yes, since 1975 and overseas MPs since 2011 (2012 first time elected)	very high
	Donate	Yes, but strict rules and high overall limits: - Donations by foreign individuals only and limited to 7500 per year and of 4600€ per election. €	medium

Source: IDEA-Voting From Abroad Database (2018), IDEA-Political Finance Database (2018), UK, German and French national laws, for more details see [Supplementary Online Material](#)

their legal framework regarding both these factors (see Table 1). In this sense, they are diverse within a tighter universe of cases within a specific subset of extra-territorial party politics. This should affect parties' incentives in terms of both scope and size in setting up transnational party branches, and ultimately impact the role and functions of these transnational branches. Put differently, we expect the different overall organizational arrangements of the transnational branches result in part from the variation in legal national framework.

This foremost explorative research focuses primarily on how the party officially presents its transnational party branches and the formal arrangements and rules that govern the internal organizational relationship between transnational party branches and their homeland national party. Therefore, the paper is mainly based on publicly available material from the websites of transnational branches and parties, party statutes, official documents, national election and party finance laws and findings of existing literature. This captures how parties organize transnational branches on paper, which in future, needs to be combined with interviews and surveys to provide additional information on how reality might diverge from the formal regulation of this aspect of party organization. We opted for a reporting of the findings case by case through an analytical narrative that aims to explore the existing diversity across cases, as a systematic comparison across all aspects is not possible due to different data availability and quality. This approach was also chosen due to the different nature of each case and thus a very different level of information that exists and is available. The main issue was to find figures on membership development overtime for all cases. While party rules are available for all cases, not all international website provide same depth, detailed and separate organizational statutes for party branches abroad (see for example French PS international website). In order to corroborate the findings based on these materials and to strengthen further the observation made here, the paper used existing

findings on international party branches often based on interviews with party members and party organizers (e.g. for Germany see Rashkova and van der Staak (2020b), for the UK Collard, S., & Kernalegenn, T: The membership of parties abroad: a case study of the UK (forthcoming) and Kernalegenn and Pellen (2020) for French parties). The next section briefly summarizes the different legal frameworks, before focusing on the size and scope of the transnational branches across the six parties.

National Legal Frameworks and transnational political participation

In order to understand why parties develop branches abroad, we need to know how national laws in their home country regulate voting and donations from abroad (Nassmacher 2009; Poptcheva 2015), i.e. the ability of international party members to influence national politics from abroad. We expect that, in countries where the law provides more possibilities for transnational political participation in terms of voting and donations, parties have overall a wider scope and size of transnational branches and that these branches are more integrated into the organizational structure of the national homeland party. Table 1 summarizes the findings based on the 2018 legal situation in the three countries regarding the right to vote from abroad and the right of nationals and foreigners to donate money.

Scope and size of transnational branches

Based on the legal incentives outlined in table one above, we expect differences in scope and size in transnational party branches of the three countries analyzed here. In terms of location and number, the first thing one can notice from Table 2 below is that the representation of the parties in individual countries differ substantially, with some having more than one branch per country (for example, the UK Conservative party has multiple branches in the U.S.). France has the highest number of transnational party branches. This is most likely explained by the introduction of MPs representing French citizens abroad in 2011 (Le Petit Journal 2012; see Appendix 1). The relatively high number of transnational branches in UK parties is harder to explain, especially given that the Conservatives have considerably more international branches than Labour.

The second observation based on Table 2 concerns the location of the transnational branches of the six parties. In contrast to most of the other cases, German parties have the majority of their branches within Europe and only very few branches outside

Table 2 Number of transnational party representation and branches by Homeland Party in percentage (N) in 2018

Country	Party	Party representation in countries		Total number of representations in countries	Number of branches in		Total number of branches
		Europe	Rest		Europe	Rest	
UK	CON	38% (16)	62% (26)	42	37% (25)	63% (42)	67
	LAB	54% (14)	46% (12)	26	48% (22)	52% (24)	46
France	LR	26% (24)	74% (68)	92	20% (24)	80% (96)	120
	PS	26% (15)	74% (42)	57	35% (30)	65% (56)	86
Germany	CDU	55% (11)	45% (9)	20	55% (12)	45% (10)	22
	SPD	69% (9)	31% (4)	13	73% (11)	27% (4)	15

Sources: Party Websites, Newspaper Articles

Europe (mainly in the U.S.). In stark contrast, the two French parties have a dense network of branches outside Europe spanning nearly the entire globe. Here it is interesting to note that the two French parties studied here had already a relatively important network before the introduction of overseas MPs, which is not the case for the other French parties, which were almost non-existent abroad until then. Thus, overseas constituencies can be, but are not always necessary, for the development of parties abroad. Again, the case of the two UK parties is less clear. Both Labour International (LI) and Conservative Abroad (CA) have a very similar presence in Europe but they differ substantially in their number of branches in the rest of the world. According to their respective websites, LI has officially 24 branches in 12 countries and CA 42 branches in 26 countries. This variance might be due to different ideology (Joppke 2003), the historically different socio-economic profile and different level of global mobility between the members and supporters of the two political parties.

Overall, as expected, France has the highest number of transnational branches due to the incentives provided by the legal framework. Surprisingly, Germany has the least number of transnational branches even though the legal and electoral system incentives are higher compared to the UK. The higher number of UK transnational branches might be due to the larger emigrant community compared to Germany. Further Rashkova and van der Staak (2020b) outline that German parties stress the high level of heterogeneity among German expats and the very low registration rate with the Embassy in the host country as main difficulties when reaching out to them, explaining further the low level of investment in party structures abroad. However, difference in scope of branches abroad might also be due to the role and function of these branches discussed later.

Further, it is possible to observe a growth of international party branches over time. While for example the CA originally started with only 35 active branches operating in 21 countries (Rutt 2007), today it has 67 branches in 42 countries (Conservative Abroad 2018). Although, while in 2018 the SPD stated it is currently in the process of setting up eight new transnational branches, these are not listed on the website until today (SPD International 2018).¹ This expansion in branches might be indicative for an increase in membership over time.

The next step is therefore to discuss the membership level of these transnational party branches. Unfortunately, there is very limited information on this: not only do we not have membership figures for all parties, but also in most cases, the membership size is supplied by the party and thus should be treated with care (Verba et al. 1987; van Haute and Gauja 2015).

In terms of aggregate membership levels, the French PS claims to have ca. 2000 members in 2018 (Parti Socialiste français à l'étranger 2018) and *Les Républicains* (LR), 3332 by the end of 2017 (calculation based on figures from Mourgue 2017).

In 2019, the UK CA estimated their membership size at 544 (Collard, S., & Kernalegenn, T: The membership of parties abroad: a case study of the UK. forthcoming) a considerable decline compared to estimates by Conservative Home of 1400 in 2007 (Rutt 2007). The UK LI states it has more than 2,400 members (Labour 2018). According to the official party newspaper of the German SPD, it had ca. 5000 international members in 2016 (Doering 2016). This is in stark contrast to the CDU, which only had 240 members in 2017 (Niedermayer 2018). In the case of the CDU, it is also possible to

¹These transnational branches under construction are not included in Table 1

somewhat reliably trace membership development overtime. In 1997, the CDU transnational branches consisted of 70 members; in 2017, this has grown to 240 members (Niedermayer 2018; see Fig. 1 below).

While these figures provide some insight into the membership size of parties' transnational branches at the aggregate level, it is important to stress that membership size can vary between countries and branches. For example, the members of the LR in the BeNeLux countries provide 20% of all members abroad (12% in Belgium alone) (Mourgue 2017); 4.8% of all SPD members abroad are based in Brussels and a further 6% in France (SPD International 2018). However, some of the parties impose a minimum membership size for a transnational branch to be able to exist. For example, LI requires at least 10 members per branch (Labour International). In the French LR only branches with 50 members are automatically entitled to a delegate at the national congress (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015, Art 11.1) and the national party has the power to merge transnational branches if the membership size is too low (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015, Art 8.2).²

The section started with the expectation that, in countries where the law provides more possibilities for transnational political participation in terms of voting and donations, parties will have a larger scope and size of transnational party branches.

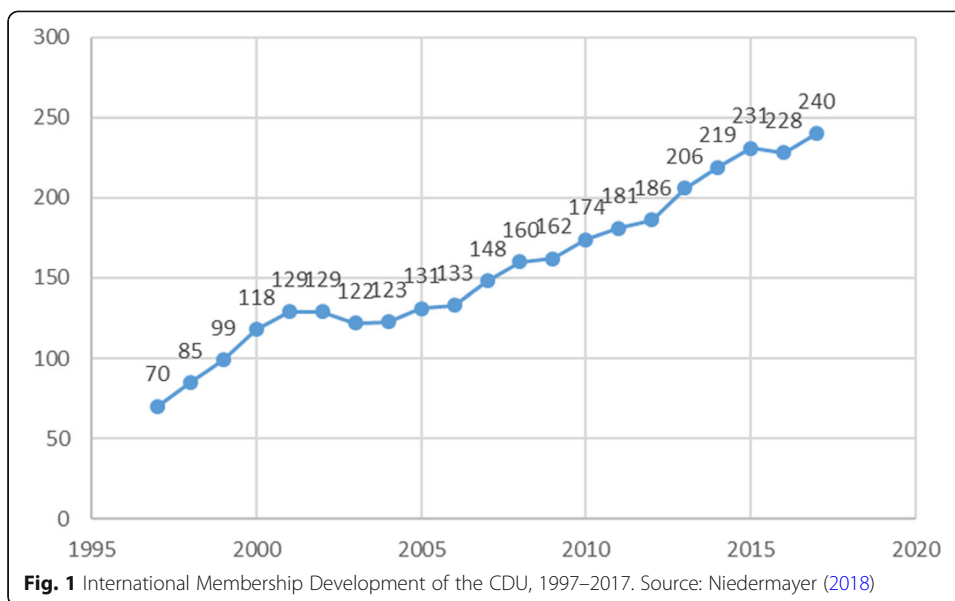
Based on this, one would expect France to have the most developed network followed by Germany and then the UK but we find that the UK is ahead of Germany. Thus, it seems that scope and size of transnational party branches networks are not always in line with legal framework so other factors might matter too, such as the nature of organization discussed below. We also find that while numbers and locations of transnational branches vary considerably across countries and parties, transnational membership size vary less across parties and countries as one might assume based on the different number of branches. However, there is some evidence of the growing importance and relevance of transnational party branches as both membership size and number of branches has increased over time. The next step is to outline how these differences in legal framework, scope and size affect how integrated the transnational branches are in the organizational structure of the national party by focusing on the role and link between transnational branches, their members, and the national homeland party.

The organization and membership rules of transnational party branches

This section analyzes the organizational link between parties and their transnational branches by focusing on how national parties regulate and organize transnational branches and individual membership. In order to do so, the paper focuses on four central aspects:

1. The official role of international party branches;
2. Who can join them and how (membership fees, nationality and dual membership);
3. Their influence in intra-party decision-making processes (representation in the homeland party or at the Annual Party Congress);

²However, the leadership of the LR can also assign a delegate to smaller branches if they wish to do so (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015: Art. 11.2).



4. The control of international party branches by the national party (both in organizational and financial questions).

By analyzing these aspects, the paper applies Poguntke's (2000) classification of different types of organizational relationship between parties and other organizations, collateral organizations and thus outline the exact type of organizational link between the transnational party branches and national parties. It provides a first explorative analysis on how the specific subset of transnational party branches are organized and integrated into the national party.

Political parties and collateral organizations

Poguntke (2002, pp. 9–10) defines collateral organizations as 'those intermediary organizations which interact either formally or informally with political parties and thereby connect party elites with relevant portions of the electorate'. Poguntke (2000, 2002) distinguishes between four types of collateral organizations in addition to the traditional party membership organization, each with different characteristics (see Table 3). On one extreme, we can find independent collateral organizations that are, as the name suggests, fully independent from the party but have strong ties to the party due to partial or full overlapping memberships and some rights. Corporate membership represents a connection between the party and an intermediary organization and involves collective membership of organizational members in the party. On the other end of the scale, we find ancillary organizations characterized by full integration in the party and where all its members are part of the party, have rights, but are also highly controlled by the party. Affiliated organizations are very similar to ancillary organizations but with only partial overlap in memberships and less control by the party. The aim of the next section is to study which type(s) of collateral organization of Poguntke's (2000) typology best-fit transnational party branches. The paper considers that all types of

collateral organizations can have an international form, but which type parties select depends on the incentives provided by the national legal framework outlined above (Table 1).

Conservatives Abroad (CA) was established more than 20 years ago and its primary goal is to provide a forum for ‘like-minded people to socialize and to give a platform for political discussion on matters of mutual interest’ (Conservative Abroad 2018). Further, the national party defines four aims of its transnational party branches: (1) to keep in touch with politics at home, (2) to provide information on issues that British citizens living overseas face, (3) to register voters from abroad and (4) to lobby to reform overseas voting laws to drop the 15 years voting right limit (Conservative Abroad 2018). The national party also suggests five ways CA can help the national party (Conservative Abroad 2018). The first two are to register to vote and to donate money and time to the party. The party suggests that time should be best spent on telling friends about CA and register to vote. Collard, S., & Kernalegenn, T: The membership of parties abroad: a case study of the UK (forthcoming) confirm that CA main aim is to gain electoral advantage but even more to raise funds. Finally, the party encourages commenting issues that its members face whilst living overseas. However, the section does not specify how and if there are any formal channels of communication between the CA and its individual branches and the national party.

Given its very broad aims and scope, membership of CA is very open and everyone living abroad and pledging support for the UK Conservative Party can join. You do not have to be a voter or a UK citizen, but you are required to pay a minimum recommended annual subscription of £25.00. Membership needs to be renewed annually.

The next aspect to consider is the influence of CA in intra-party decision-making processes. There is no formal representation for the branches of CA and its members in the national party. In line with this, the CA are not mentioned in the Party Constitution (2009). The only formal interaction between the CA and the national party is the annual ‘Conservatives Abroad Conference & Dinner’. But the label ‘Conference’ is misleading as this is a one-day event for which members have to pay (ca. £22.00 in 2014)

Table 3 Types of collateral organizations

	Independent collateral organization	Cooperative connected collateral organization	Affiliated organization	Ancillary organization
Type of membership	optional individual membership	cooperative membership (individual optional)	individual membership	individual membership
Overlap of membership	Partial	partial	partial	full
Membership rights	Individual	collective (individual optional)	individual	individual
Type of organizational link	Informal	formal	formal	formal
Control of national party	Low	low	high	very high
Example	Civil Society organizations which support and share political views with party	Party Trade Union links	Party Youth Movements	Intra-Party Women Group

Source: adapted and translated from Poguntke (2000, p. 38 - Table 2.1)

and it mainly consists of keynote speeches, voter registration drive and updates. Part of the conference is devoted to hearing from CA about their 'thoughts and ideas for engaging expats to vote' and 'to have their say' (Conservative Abroad 2018). However, there are no formal votes on organizational, political personnel, or policy issues. Overall, it seems that CA is more of an international discussion club than a true party branch with a role within the national party.

This is further supported by the very limited control of the national party over the transnational branches. While there is a formal Chairman/woman (at the moment) of the organization and a team of officers, it is unclear what their role, function and interaction with the transnational branches are. Their main role seems to be to help set up additional branches and supply existing branches with the official website template to encourage consistency across branches' websites.

Following Poguntke's classification (2000), CA best fits with the characteristics of an independent collateral organization. It is based on individual membership with only partial overlap with the national party; members have very few if any individual rights and little influence in the national organization. Furthermore, the control of the homeland party is very weak, and links are mainly informal (Collard, S., & Kernalegenn, T: The membership of parties abroad: a case study of the UK. forthcoming).

In contrast to the CA, Labour International (LI) has a formal role within the national party and is governed by its own rules. The LI rules outline six aims and objectives. The first is to promote the aims, values and objectives of the UK Labour Party as set out in Clause IV of the Party Rule book outside of the UK. Next, it provides a focal point for the social and political needs of all LI members. In this regard, LI also aims to provide the UK Labour Party with feedback from its overseas members and to act as a source of information and advice based on the international experience of those members. Not surprisingly, LI also aims to develop electoral support for the party among British citizens abroad and support the Labour Party's fundraising efforts. Lastly, LI also promotes the interaction with sister parties when appropriate. This is also reflected in the membership rules.

The formal LI rules (Labour International Rules 2010, §2 and 3) stipulate that full membership is open to all UK subjects or citizens of Eire, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man who are residents abroad. In order to become a member, they need to enroll with the national party head office and pay the appropriate fee. Furthermore, UK and NI members who are only temporarily resident abroad (no time limits stated) will retain their existing membership of the party but need to notify head office of their overseas stay. However, membership of LI is not a condition for participation in LI and many branches encourage Labour supporters as well as members of sister parties in other countries to take part in LI activities (Labour International).

The next aspect to discuss is the role and influence of LI in the national party. The rules outline that LI is managed by a six-member LI Coordinating Committee (LICC) elected for 2 years by all LI members using a one-member-one-vote system (ILR § 5,6 and 18–20). The rules require that at least three women need to be part of the LICC. The role of the LICC is it to represent the views and interests of LI members as the overseas Constituency Labour Party (CLP) Organization. The LICC works in conjunction with the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Labour Party and has regular meetings with the NEC. Further, under Article 25–33, LI is entitled to appoint delegates to the Annual Conference on the same basis as British-based CLPs. Any member

of LI with 12 months membership of the Labour Party at the date of nomination and proposed and seconded by LI members may submit themselves for nomination as delegate. The LI branches can submit motions and resolutions to the LICC who is then responsible for submitting them to the Conference. The LICC covers the travel costs for the delegate(s) as long as they are reasonable. Overall, LI branches have formal links to the homeland party with influence on internal party aspects comparable to national CLP branches.

The last aspect to consider is the control of the national party over LI. Given the degree of influence of LI within the party, it is not surprising that the national party controls and influences various aspects of LI. First, everyone who wants to become member of LI needs to register and be approved by the National party. Membership subscriptions are shared between LI and Head Office on the same basis as for CLPs. In addition, the NEC of the Labour Party has the right to appoint a representative from the party as an ex-officio member of the LICC. Nevertheless, Labour grants a lot of power to the LICC. It controls the finances of all LI branches. For example, specific items of expenditure of £250 or above need to be approved by the LICC. In addition, the LICC has the power to recognize new LI branches if they fulfill all conditions outlined in the LI rules.

Labour's relation to its transnational branches fits best with ancillary organization with formal organizational link, mostly fully overlapping membership and very high control by the national party (Poguntke 2000). This is surprising given the low incentives for UK parties to develop transnational branches. We expected a very low level of integration, as it is the case for the Conservative discussed above. Thus, it seems country factors are not all and party types also matter, with social-democratic parties maybe more inclined to set up formal organizational link. (Collard, S., & Kernalegenn, T: The membership of parties abroad: a case study of the UK. forthcoming) also highlight that LI was created under pressure from activists abroad and thus they might have been able to secure more rights compared to CA branches.

Germany

The next two cases to consider are the German CDU and SPD. Both parties call their transnational branches 'international party friendship groups'. However, despite the same name, there are considerable differences between the two parties in terms of rights and obligations of transnational branches.

Similarly to the other transnational party branches presented above, the purpose of the CDU friendship groups are: voter registration, support in electoral campaigns abroad and donation of time and money. At the same time, friendship groups should help to communicate the aims and goals of the party to Germans abroad and vice-versa. The friendship groups are forums for like-minded people to meet and be informed about the activities of the national party. The national party offers support and advice to its international members, however exactly in what areas remains unclear.

In order to join a transnational branch, individuals have to be over 16 years of age and either German or a citizen of a European Union member state. Anyone else had to live at least 3 years in Germany and has to have a resident permit to become a full member or can be accepted as guest member. Transnational branches have the authority to admit members or not. In the absence of a transnational branch in the country,

members are re-directed to another transnational branch, based on the decision of local Berlin-Center branch (CDU Statutes 2016, § 4).

International friendship groups are not officially part of the organizational structure of the CDU (CDU im Ausland 2018). However, the party statutes formally grant the right to international friendship groups to be represented and vote at the national party congress. Each group, regardless of its size, sends one delegate with voting rights (§28). Members of friendship groups have the right to request motions to be discussed during the party congress (CDU bylaws §6). However, so far, the party only officially recognizes the Brussels friendship group and it is the only international group (out of 22) that enjoys all these rights (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung 2018; Rashkova and van der Staak 2020b).

The last aspect is the control of the national party over the friendship groups. According to §18, the acceptance of transnational branches lies with the party's national central office, which also determines its functioning and governing rules. Furthermore, the party's national central office co-ordinates the activities between the national party and the international friendship groups and between the international friendship groups themselves. Any organizational change needs to be approved by the national party general secretary.

Returning to Poguntke's classification (2000), the CDU's international friendship groups resemble affiliated organizations. While the organizational link is still formal, control of the national party is lower and memberships only partly overlap. Further, the rights allocated to transnational branches are low and differ with only one branch fully integrated into the membership organization (Rashkova and van der Staak 2020b).

The purpose of the SPD's transnational branches is to influence the political opinion of Germans abroad and complement the work of the SPD abroad. They aim to offer Germans living abroad a possibility to stay politically informed and a forum for exchange and for political participation. They keep in close contact with the national party and sister parties in the host country (SPD Auslandsrichtlinie 2009, §2). This is similar to UK Labour Party above and points to the previous suggestion that this seems to be a feature of social-democratic parties. Thus, the differences seems to be in part more due to the party type and less due to the legal framework.

Every individual above the age of 14 can join the SPD regardless of nationality. Germans and non-Germans living abroad can join the party's international friendship groups. A double membership in a party member of the Party of European Socialists (PES) or the Socialist International (SI) is possible. After considering and voting on a request for membership, the international friendship groups refer the request to the regional Berlin party branch for the final decision (SPD Auslandsrichtlinie 2009, §3).

The rights of international members within the party are very limited. Only the four transnational branches recognized by the party have the right to submit a motion to the party congress.³ However, they are not granted a delegate with voting rights. This is mainly due to the fact that all branches that were founded after these four and any future branch are not officially part of the party organizational structure but are classified as forums (SPD Party statutes §10(2)). The advantage of this is that non-members

³The four branches are: Auslands-OV Brüssel: Unterbezirk Aachen-Stadt (LV NRW) Auslands-OV Luxemburg: Unterbezirk Saarbrücken (LV SL) Auslands-OV Kapstadt: Kreis Berlin-Mitte (LV BE) Internationaler Ortsverein Bonn: Unterbezirk Bonn (LV NRW).

can take part in the forums. The disadvantage, however, is that the rules and rights are set by the party in central office.

Despite the limited rights of international members and branches, the party exerts considerable control over them. The national central office of the party is in charge of all organizational aspects of the international friendship groups. If Germans living abroad want to establish a new branch, they need the approval of the national central office. If accepted, their members are registered and managed by the regional Berlin branch. However, the representatives of the transnational branches are supplied with the membership data of their branch. Furthermore, representatives have to submit an annual report to the party central office about their branch's activities, its number of active and passive members and the involvement and role of non-members. In addition, the finances of transnational party branches are fully dependent on the national party. Transnational party branches do not automatically receive any share of the membership fees paid by their members, and the Berlin regional branch covers all their expenses. They are only allowed to spend 15% of the funds their branch initially contributed.

The analysis of the transnational branches of the SPD shows that they can be classified as affiliated organizations (Poguntke 2000). They are characterized by a formal organizational link, with substantial control by the national party but membership only overlaps partly, and members enjoy limited rights. Further, the rights allocated to members of transnational branches differ, with only four branches enjoying very limited ways to be heard within the party.

France

The internal rules of the *Les Républicains* (LR) define the promotion of the party's ideas and values abroad as the main purpose of its transnational party branches. Furthermore, transnational branches aim to integrate the suggestions and the specific needs of international members abroad into the party's program and represents them in the executive board (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015, Article 4). In addition, the LR website highlights the value and benefit of international members as they provide new ideas and original proposals based on their experience abroad (LR français de l'étranger 2018). It is interesting to note that, in contrast to most other parties discussed here, LR do not mention the mobilization of French voters abroad or the donation of time and money to help the party as one of the aims of the transnational party branches.

Everyone who is 18 years old or more can join the party. The rules do not require individuals to be French. Just as for national members, international membership applications need to be confirmed by the party in central office. Furthermore, all members need to pay an annual membership fee (30 euros per person). Everyone who has paid their annual membership fee and is living outside France is considered a member of the *Fédération des Français de l'étranger* of *Les Républicains*. It is also possible to join the transnational branch as supporter. While it is free and allows supporters to be involved in activities and debates, the status does not grant intra-party voting rights.

The next step is to discuss the influence of LR abroad in the intra-party decision-making processes. Article 11 of the International party rules stipulates that each branch of 50 members or more have the right to elect a delegate to represent them at the national party congress. Delegates at the congress have the right to submit motions and

to vote. If a branch has less than 50 members, the General Secretary of the transnational branches can grant this branch a delegate or can decide to merge it within a bigger branch (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015, Art. 11.2). Thus, the General Secretary can use these rights strategically to strengthen or weaken the intra-party power of certain smaller transnational branches. Further, the local office of each transnational branch has the right to propose a list of Parliamentary and Senate candidates for the specific overseas constituency to be considered by the national party selection committee. In addition, the leadership of each transnational branch has the right to impose sanctions on its members (suspension or exclusion) (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015, Art. 20 and 21). Overall, the transnational branches of LR can influence and participate in the intra-party decision-making processes during the party congress and in the candidate selection process.

The last aspect to consider is the control of the national party over the transnational branches. For branches with less than 50 members, the National General Secretary selects the head of the branch. If the branch has more than 50 members, the members vote to select the leader, but this choice needs to be approved by the national party office (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015, Art 10.4). Furthermore, the National General Secretary has the power to dismiss any branch leader (Art. 12.2) and to revoke any delegate (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015, Art 22). In addition, the National General Secretary can impose disciplinary measures on branch members (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015, Art 20.1). Article 10 outlines that the national party leadership has the right to dissolve any transnational branch. Besides, the national party has strict control over the finances and budget of transnational branches. All gains from membership fees and other sources need to be transferred to the national party, which then redistributes the money. All transnational branches are required to have a French bank account (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015, Art 24.3) and payments in cash are prohibited (LR Règlement Intérieur 2015, Art 5.3).

Overall members of the transnational branches of LR have substantial rights and the possibility to influence and participate in intra-party decisions, but transnational branches are also highly controlled by the national party. Returning to Poguntke's typology (2000), the case of the LR transnational branches fits the characteristics of an ancillary organization that is formally and fully integrated into the organizational structure of the party. This is further underlined by the fact that international members suffered from the same loss of influence during the last presidential primary as national members. The national party not only allowed all international members but also sympathizers to vote in presidential primary (Quinault-Maupoil 2016). The LR is the only case studied here where a conservative party has highly established branches. Here it seems that the legal framework plays a role. Therefore, conservative parties appear to display little or no integration except if legal incentives are provided.

There is very little information available on the formal regulation of the transnational branches of the PS as it was not possible to find the internal rules of the international party branches and federation. However, according to PS Party statutes, members of external branches and its members are considered as a federation like any other and thus are regulated by the general party rules.

The official role of the transnational party branches of the PS is to support the cause and proposition of the PS and spreads its ideas on a global level. Furthermore, its

purposes are to support the party during the election campaigns and attract as many overseas voters as possible. The transnational party branches are also supposed to help the PS develop policies that address specific difficulties that French citizens face abroad. Lastly, the PS sees its international members as ambassadors of France and a way to increase its influence outside France.

Everyone who is 18 years old or more can join the party abroad. The rules do not require individuals to be French. Furthermore, all members need to pay the membership fees (depending on their income). International membership application needs to be confirmed by the party's central office. If accepted, an individual member is registered in one of the transnational branches. These branches form together the *Fédération des Français hors de France*. The PS statutes stipulate that this federation is similar to any other national federation (PS Statutes 2015, Art. Article 2.4.1.1). Therefore, it has the same rights.

In terms of influence in intra-party decisions, international members have the right to vote for the selection of the party leader, just like national members. Furthermore, all members of the transnational party branches have the right to vote to select the chair of the *Fédération des Français à l'étranger: FFE-PS*. This chair is also member of the national executive of the PS in France. The federation has the right to send delegates and to propose motions at the National Party Congress (PS Statutes 2015, Art 3.2.4). In order for a federation to have the right to send a delegate to the National Party Congress, it needs to consist of at least 50 members and five branches (PS Statutes 2015, Art 2.4.3.2). How many they can send is determined by the number of members who voted on the policy suggestions of the national party leadership (PS Statutes 2015, Art 3.2.11).

The last aspect to outline is the control the national party has over the transnational party branches. While the transnational branches can set their own rules, they need to be approved by national executive. The High Ethics Authority can scrutinize all aspects of the transnational branches, such as their functions, role, actions and finances (PS Statutes 2015, Art 6). The article 4.5.2.1 mentions that the National Party Council can dissolve any party federation or put it under its direct control if the federation engaged in serious acts of indiscipline or actions likely to cause serious harm to the party. It may also pronounce the dissolution of a federation in the event of inactivity. Finally, the federation has no formal say in determining the candidates representing the international constituencies at elections. These are decided by the National Party office (PS Statutes 2015, Art 5.2.2 and 5.2.3).

Returning to Poguntke's (2000) classification, the PS federation abroad can be classified as an ancillary organization characterized by formal organizational link, fully overlapping membership and very high control of the national party. Transnational branches and its members have to follow the same rules and enjoy the same rights as PS branches and members inside France. Thus, French parties grant their members abroad a very high number of rights, which comes with a very high level of centralized control (Kernalegenn and Pellen 2020).

The section above discussed the role, functions, and power of the transnational party branches and their relationship to the national homeland party. Based on these features, it is possible to identify what type of organization

transnational party branches have. Are they fully integrated into the party organization or a collateral organization, and if so, what type? Following Poguntke (2000), the transnational party branches of the parties analyzed here can be classified as follows (Table 4):

There is a diversity in the organizational link between the national party and the transnational party branches. Overall, the argument that the national legal framework affects how parties regulate transnational branches and its members holds, with stronger organizational links and control by the national party where parties have the most to gain in terms of votes in national elections and donations. French party branches abroad are classified as ancillary organizations characterized by formal organizational links, full overlapping memberships and very high control of the national party. Given the lower incentives provided by legal framework in Germany, the transnational branches can be classified as affiliated organizations. While the organizational link is still formal, control of the national party is lower, and membership only partly overlaps. In the UK, a mixed picture emerges. The Conservatives fit the classification of independent collateral organization, with informal links, low control and partial overlapping memberships. As for Labour, its transnational branches fit best the ancillary organization type, as in the French case. With the exception of the UK parties, parties within the same country have the same type of collateral organization in relation to transnational branches.

Last, it seems country factors are not all and party type also matter. Contrary to Joppke (2003) expectations, we find that Conservatives parties display little or even no integration and organizational links except if legal incentives are provided, while Social-democratic parties show higher levels of integration and set up formal organizational link even when legal incentive are low. This nuance of the impact of the legal framework is confirmed by Kernalegenn and van Haute (2020) and Paarlberg (2017), finding that under certain circumstances, parties develop abroad even when the legal framework does not push them to do so.

Table 4 Summary of relationship between transnational branch and national party

	Type of member-ship	Overlap of member-ship	Member-ship rights	Type of organizational link	Control of national party	Organizational type (of transnational branches)
CON	individual member-ship	partial	individual	informal	low	independent collateral organization
LAB	individual member-ship	full	individual	Formal	very high	ancillary organization
LR	individual member-ship	full	individual	Formal	very high	ancillary organization
PS	individual member-ship	full	individual	Formal	very high	ancillary organization
CDU	individual member-ship	partial	individual	Formal	high	affiliated organizations
SPD	individual member-ship	partial	individual	Formal	high	affiliated organizations

Conclusion

This paper studies why parties develop transnational branches, and how this affects how they are organized. It argues that the development of party branches abroad differs across countries due to the national legal regulations on external voting and donations, in turn affecting how transnational branches are organized. Among the cases analyzed here French parties have the highest incentives, followed by German parties, and finally, British parties. However, looking at the scope and size of transnational party branches, we find that French parties having more branches but followed by the UK and only then Germany. The higher number of UK transnational branches especially outside Europe compared to Germany might be due to the higher levels of emigrants compared to Germany or the different nature of UK transnational branches. Using Poguntke's (2000) classification of different type of collateral organizations, the paper finds that the organizational links and the control by the national party over its transnational party branches is the highest where parties have the most to gain in terms of votes and donations. Therefore, in France transnational branches resemble ancillary organizations; in Germany, they resemble affiliated organizations, and in the UK, a mixed picture emerges with the Conservatives fitting with the expected classification of independent collateral organizations, whereas Labour's transnational branches surprisingly fit with ancillary organizations.

In short, the paper finds that parties substantially differ in location, number and size of their transnational branches. Furthermore, the organizational links between the national party and the international party branches vary across countries. As proposed, the different national legal frameworks regulating political participation from abroad can partly explain this variation but the role parties assigned to its branches abroad also matters. For now the regulation of transnational branches echoes the "Pandora's box half shut" situation outlined by Hutcheson and Arrighi (2015) for external voting: while they exist they are constrained in scope, number and nature compared to domestic branches. To test this further, the next step is to supplement the study of formal rules with interviews and surveys to provide additional information on how reality might diverge from the formal regulation of this aspect of party organization and extend the analysis of formal rules to more cases. However, it seems parties can have, if the internal rules are right, a positive impact on the linkage and levels of political engagement among expats. It can help in addressing the lack of information on external voters, reduce expats political disengagement leading to potential participation in the future elections (Garry and Roper 2011) or even address party membership decline at home (van Biezen et al. 2012). In short, transnational party membership can become a useful, effective and growing part of the multi-speed membership party organization and strategy to achieve the key party goals of vote maximization, policy implementation and office seeking (Müller and Strøm 1999).

Supplementary Information

The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00219-9>.

Additional file 1.

Appendix

Table 5 French overseas constituencies and number of voters on electoral role, 2012

Nr. of constituency	Region	Number of voters
1	US and Canada	157,363
2	Central and South America	73,746
3	Northern Europe	89,345
4	Benelux	97,574
5	Spain, Portugal, Monaco, Andorra	80,670
6	Switzerland, Lichtenstein	106,835
7	Central and Eastern Europe	89,509
8	Southern Europe	109,817
9	West Africa	98,716
10	East Africa and Middle East	92,413
11	Asia and Oceania	79,756

Source: Le Petit Journal (2012)

Abbreviations

CA: Conservatives Abroad; CDU: Christian Democratic Union of Germany; CLP: Constituency Labour Party; CON: Conservative Party, UK; LAB: Labour Party, UK; LI: Labour International; LICC: Labour International Coordinating Committee; LIR: Labour International Rules; LR: The Republicans, France; NEC: National Executive Committee; PES: Party of European Socialists; PS: Socialist Party, France; SI: Socialist International; SPD: Social Democratic Party of Germany

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Author's contributions

The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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