



# Facing the New Far Right in Southern Europe

Analysing the Rise of the Extreme Right  
After the Financial Crisis

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After the Financial Crisis

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## Introduction

# Southern Europe's new wave of radical right

**Oscar Barberà**

## Introduction

Right-wing extremist parties have been rather weak in southern Europe. The two main exceptions have been the case of the *Front National* in France and the various far right traditions in Italy, which since the 1990s have gained increasing prominence in their respective party systems. Both the French and Italian cases have received remarkable attention within the comparative literature (von Beyme, 1988b; Hainsworth, 1992; Kitschelt, 1995; Betz & Immerfall, 1998; Ignazi, 2003; Casals, 2005; Williams, 2006; Wodak, KhosraviNik & Mral, 2013; Charalambos, 2015; Akkerman, de Lange & Rooduijn, 2016; Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2016; Caiani & Císar, 2019). Outside of these two cases, the attention of studies compared to the rest of southern Europe has been lower (Hainsworth, 1992; Betz & Immerfall, 1998; Ignazi, 2003; Casals, 2005; Charalambos, 2015; Caiani & Císar, 2019).

Since the Great Recession—and the austerity policies that followed—the prominence of these parties has increased significantly. However, the relationship between the social transformations that took place during the 2010 decade and the growth experienced by these parties is not as direct as could be expected. The Spanish case is the most illustrative of this phenomenon since Vox did not achieve parliamentary representation until 2018. Similar phenomena have occurred in other countries in southern Europe.

In order to explore this and other similar issues emerging since the 2019 European elections, Fundació Nexa and the Coppieters Foundation organized a workshop entitled "Facing the new radical right in southern Europe" in May 2019. This book is, to a large extent, the result of the work carried out during those days in which several European experts addressed various issues related to the radical right in Europe, Spain and the Valencian Country<sup>1</sup>. The section that focuses on the Spanish case has been expanded with additional subsequent contributions in order to aim for a more interdisciplinary, in-depth and current view of the phenomenon.

The following sections address some aspects that should be kept in mind before the reader delves into the different chapters. The first section attempts to establish the basic terminology and define some of the main concepts used in the volume. The second discusses the characteristics of the three main waves that can be established regarding the evolution of the far right in southern Europe (France, Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal) from the postwar period until the late 2000s. The third and final section presents the main questions, approach and structure of the different chapters comprising the book.

## Beyond liberal conservatism

From the second half of the twentieth century onwards the literature has experienced difficulties reaching consensus on the name and defining features of political parties and ideologies standing to the right of liberal conservatism. This is due to their different historical trajectories, as well as important programmatic, discursive, and competitive divergences. In the mid 1980s, one of the discipline's leading scholars suggested using "right-wing extremism" as a kind of hotchpotch to include to all these parties (von Beyme, 1986, op. 176). Unlike other political

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families, these parties did not emerge either as schisms originated within their immediate political referents—the interwar fascist parties—or as variations on the post-war liberal conservative tradition. Nor have they been able to articulate stable transnational alliances over the years. Hence, for a long time these parties were grouped together due to their shared far right positioning along an ideological axis, not because of the existence of any substantive criteria that could unite them as a political family (von Beyme, 1988a; Mudde, 2002).

In recent years, the concept of "far right" has been suggested to encompass all right-wing parties that are critical of democracy or, to be more specific, of liberal democracy (Charalambos, 2015; Mudde, 2019). This concept is equivalent to what most of the preceding literature used to call "extreme right": a common label to apply to all right-wing parties beyond liberal conservatism. Opposition to the liberal-democratic consensus is the factor that all parties within this political family share: they all oppose the system (Betz, 1994; Ignazi, 2003; Carter, 2005). On the other hand, there are other fundamental ideological principles that can often also be linked to far-right parties. Among these we can find: opposition to egalitarian values (Rydgren, 2007); and authoritarian sociocultural values (e.g., those linked to defending law and order issues) (Ignazi, 1992; Kitschelt, 1995); or nationalism, which often appears along with excluding discourses of a cultural or ethnic nature, such as nativism (Betz, 1994; Rydgren, 2005; Minkenberg, 2013; Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). However, the various definitions used by academia have pointed out to the remarkable variety of fundamental ideological traits found within this political family (Mudde, 1995; Hainsworth, 2008; Arzheimer, 2019).

Given the diversity of parties and groups that the concept of far right—and previously the extreme right—encompasses, the literature has mainly focused on trying to identify the various subtypes. One of the first classifying criteria stemmed from the fact that remarkable differences were found between nostalgic post-war parties and those born after the 1980s (see next section). Old far-right parties shared various traits such as their location within the far right political spectrum of their respective countries, shared historical or ideological ties with interwar fascist parties, and hostile attitudes towards liberal democracy. The new parties, however, explicitly rejected links with classical fascism and sought to mobilize new issues more attuned to post-industrial societies, such as those related to law and order or immigration (Ignazi, 2003). Other authors have categorized these parties based on their position regarding democracy and the rule of law. Depending on their opposition to either of these principles parties have been grouped into "antidemocratic" or "democratic but anti-constitutional" (Carter, 2005). Hence the

(now) usual contrast found in the latest literature between far-right parties and radical right parties (Mudde, 2019).

In its narrowest use, the concept of far right is used to define a specific subset of right-wing political parties that reject the two key pillars of democracy: popular sovereignty and majority government. The far right tends to prefer authoritarian solutions, without ruling out revolutionary means in order to install them. The most extremist groups often resort to violent actions for political purposes, which is why they are often banned or prosecuted by the police. All parties sharing nostalgia for old authoritarian systems would fall into this category. Therefore, Fascism, Francoism, Neo-Nazism, etc., would be considered as specific tags within the same subtype: the far right.

By contrast, parties on the radical right accept democracy as a way to legitimize decisions. However, accepting the principles of popular sovereignty and majority government does not preclude them from being hostile to many of the liberal foundations that underpin contemporary democracies: the separation of powers, minorities rights, and so on (Kitschelt, 1995; Carter, 2005; Mudde, 2007). Obviously, the fundamental question is to what extent is it possible in contemporary democracies to separate obedience to popular sovereignty from respect for the rule of law. Does the use of the democratic principle against the rule of law actually undo both? In this case the differences between extreme and radical right would fade into the background. However, it is important to note that radical right-wing parties have tended to distance themselves from the revolutionary pathway and the use of political violence as a means to achieve it. Therefore, the differences would not only be strictly ideological, but also regarding the means used to advance their purposes.

Acceptance of the popular sovereignty principle by the right radical has contributed to populism becoming one of the key ideological components of this party subtype. Hence the use of "populist radical right" by many authors to refer to these parties (Betz, 1994; Betz & Immerfall, 1998; Mudde, 2007; Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2016). Of course there are many definitions and approaches to populism (Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). From an ideological viewpoint, one of the most influential definitions is Mudde's, who considers populist to be discourses that divide society into two antagonistic groups—the people (pure) and the elites (corrupt)—, and who consider that politics should obey the will of the people (Mudde, 2004, 2019). Obviously, when defined as an ideology, there can be both left-wing and right-wing populism. However, there are right-wing parties, that for different reasons, cannot be considered populist. In the case of the liberal or

liberal-conservative right due to its suspicious attitude towards liberal democracy. As for the far right it is its hostility towards the very concept of popular sovereignty that prevents them from being defined as populist.

## Far right waves of evolution in southern Europe until the Great Recession

The need to differentiate between the various European right-wing parties is already present in the seminal studies on this political family (von Beyme, 1988a). This idea has been further developed and updated by subsequent authors (Zimmermann and Saalfeld, 1993; Casals, 2009; Mudde, 2019). In the lines that follow an attempt will be made to adapt these waves to the particularities that these parties and movements presented in southern Europe until the Great Recession began.

The far right's contemporary political precedents must be sought in the interwar fascist parties. These were built mimicking military discipline and organization, which explains for their base's elements being articulated as militias that functioned as paramilitary groups (Duverger, 1954). A key feature of these parties' organization and ideology was the cult of the leader, from which stemmed an uninhibited commitment to authoritarian political solutions. Ideologically fascism also had a clear disruptive spirit and one challenging both the constitutional order and socio-economic system. Not only was fascism anti-liberal but also openly anti-capitalist. In fact, fascist parties' programs were deliberately presented as a third way between communism and capitalism (Payne, 1996; Mudde, 2019, chap. 2). The corporatist model, largely connected to the Catholic Church's social doctrine, was one of the biggest programmatic commitments of this type of parties in southern Europe. Unlike conservative parties, fascist parties appealed to mass mobilization, however the aim behind this strategy was not decision-making, but executing the leader's will. Glorification of participation was carried out from a strong—and often racist—nationalist discourse (e.g. anti-Semitic), accompanied by the use of violence for political purposes. Except for the Italian case, fascism came to power in the rest of southern European countries by authoritarian means, and often in alliance with other groups such as the military and the Catholic hierarchy. Once in power these parties seized the opportunity to dismantle democratic liberalism's fragile institutions and repress opposition. The totalitarian nature of such regimes as that of Franco in Spain or that of Salazar in Portugal continues to stir controversy among academics today, although there is some consensus over the fact that it tended to substantially

dilute after World War II. However, authoritarian corporatism's structures tended to survive while dictatorship lasted (Malefakis, 2000; Moradiellos, 2000).

After World War II many fascist parties were outlawed, persecuted or became marginal actors in most European countries. The use of paramilitary organizations was also explicitly prohibited by the post-war constitutions. In this context, the first wave of the right-wing extremist movement was characterized by the emergence of new organizations that were born in the immediate postwar period and sought to maintain a clear continuity with the ideology and regimes of interwar period fascism. The nostalgic and controversial character of these organizations, which refused to accept constitutional order, hindered their constitution as political parties and limited their electoral success. The epitome of this type of parties was *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, which did enjoy some electoral success during Italy's First Republic (Caciagli, 1988; Sidoti, 1992; Ignazi, 1994). In Spain, Greece and Portugal this first generation of right-wing extremist parties appeared after each country's respective dictatorships ended, not during the post-war period. These parties' main features were a sense of nostalgia for authoritarian regimes and a remarkable fragmentation. These traits made it difficult for these parties to access and consolidate parliamentary representation (Davis, 1998; Ignazi, 2003, chap. 12). A similar situation took place in Greece. National Alignment (*Εθνική Παράταξις* [*Ethniki Parataxis*] in Greek) was created as a protest party that tried to capitalize both discontent over the abolition of monarchy and nostalgia for the authoritarian regime. This party won five seats in the 1977 elections, but was unable to revalidate those results in later years (Dimitras, 1992; Ellinas, 2013; Georgiadou, 2013). In Spain, *Unión Nacional* coalition, which was made up of several parties sharing a nostalgia for Franco's regime, won a seat in the 1979 general elections, just after the approval of the Spanish Constitution. However, after the 1981 failed coup, fragmentation, nostalgic discourse and organizational problems led their way out of institutions for decades (Rodríguez Jiménez, 1994; Casals, 1995; Ellwood, 1995). In Portugal, this type of party did not even achieve parliamentary representation during the Transition years (Gallagher, 1992; Marchi, 2009)

The second wave spans over a long period of time in which these movements and parties were institutionally marginal in Western democracies (Mudde, 2019, chap. 1). During these years—from the 1950s to the 1980s—there were several renewal attempts that failed. A first try attempted to channel discontent with the creation of post-war welfare regimes during the 1950s and 1960s. The most important political movement in this regard was France's Poujadism, which by means of a typically populist discourse articulated merchants' protests with the peripheral

petty bourgeoisie' against the political and intellectual elites (Shields, 2007, chap. 3). France was not the only case, and bourgeois parties sprang up all over Europe revolting against changes in tax systems to finance the emerging welfare systems. Many of these parties ended up merging with post-war conservative movements and parties such as Gaullism in France or Christian Democracy in Germany (von Beyme, 1988a, pp. 10–11; Mudde, 2019, chap. 1). In other southern European countries these parties were much more residual due to the existence of dictatorships and, once democracies were recovered, due to the strong statist imprint that these regimes had left on the right.

Beginning in the 1970s a second stream of renewal took place, led by a series of intellectual renewal movements. In France, Alain de Benoist led the *Nouvelle Droite* movement, which encouraged a shift from nostalgic arguments and biological (anti-Semitic) racism to a culturally-rooted racism centered on new issues, such as immigration. The Benoist-led Research and Study Group for European Civilization (GRECE in its French acronym) played a key role in this movement. This change of framework was also accompanied by nativist arguments that proposed prioritizing nationals in the provision of social services. This discursive renewal was politically capitalized years later by the *Front National* (Shields, 2007, chap. 6). Attempts to renew extremist discourse within *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) were also made in Italy, specially by its *Democrazia Nazionale* faction (Caciagli, 1988; Sidoti, 1992; Ignazi, 1994). In the rest of southern Europe, this intellectual renewal arrived in the 1980s and its impact was moderate. In Greece, the group that later became Golden Dawn (*Χρυσή Αυγή* [*Chrysí Avgí*] in Greek) initially used a name that was similar France's GREECE. They also translated works by Benoist into Greek, which undoubtedly shows the efforts made by the far right to revise its more extremist postulates (Georgiadou, 2013, p. 75). In Portugal these ideas spread thanks to *Futuro Presente* magazine, published since the late 1970s (Marchi, 2016). In Spain these revisionist movements were not particularly relevant (Rodríguez Jiménez, 2013, p. 260)

A third attempt to gain relevance was driven by some factions which, starting in the 1960s, opted for the use of political violence. This phenomenon arrived at a time when extremist political violence was on the rise around Europe for the first time in several decades. In southern Europe actions by far-right violent groups had some repercussion. In France attacks were mainly connected to *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS), whose actions took place as a reaction to the decolonization processes in Algeria and Congo (Shields, 2007, chap. 4). In Italy the use of political violence by extremist groups—many of them being MSI splits—was sporadic between the 1960s and 1980s (Caciagli, 1988; Ignazi, 1994). In Spain and Greece

the various groups that emerged at the end of their respective dictatorships used political violence in an attempt to destabilize the Transition processes (Ellwood, 1992; Rodríguez Jiménez, 1997; Casals, 2000; Xenakis, 2012). In Portugal violent actions during the Transition to democracy years were minor, partly due to the repression that followed the 1974 coup (Gallagher, 1992; Marchi, 2013).

The third wave began in the 1980s, but was not politically relevant until the following decade. This third wave stands out due to the ideological transformation carried out by some parties or organizations born during the previous stage. Some of the most extremist aspects of their programs were exchanged for new ideological approaches, closer to those of the radical right. These changes favored their access to institutions. The successes that this changes brought inspired new parties to replicate some of the same approaches in their countries. In southern Europe this stage's undisputed benchmark was France's *Front National's* progressive transformation. Starting in the mid-1980s the party began gaining electoral prominence on the basis of a discourse that focused on immigration, anti-egalitarian ideas and a liberal economic program. The *Front National's* leader, Jean Marie Le Pen, was committed to connecting immigration with unemployment, identity issues or citizen insecurity. The *Front National* anti-egalitarian ideas also got translated into typically neoliberal economic proposals. These approaches led the party to distance itself from the corporatist approaches of other southern Europe far-right parties (Mayer & Perrineau, 1996; Shields, 2007, chap. 7 and 8).

**Table 1. Main far-right parties in Southern Europe until the Great Recession**

	FRANCE	ITALY	SPAIN	PORTUGAL	GREECE
<b>1st wave 1945-1950s</b>	-	MSI	UN (1970s)	-	AN (1970s)
<b>2nd wave 1950s-1980s</b>	UDCA	-	-	-	-
<b>3rd wave 1980s-2000s</b>	FN	AN LN	ARM E2000 PxC	AN/PNR	EPEN LAOS AD

Source: own elaboration. Relevant parties without representation are shown in smaller typography.

Acronyms: AD: Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή, *Chrysi Avgi*); AN: National Alignment (Εθνική Παράταξις, *Ethniki Parataxis*); AN(IT): *Alleanza Nazionale*; AN/PNR (PT): *Aliança Nacional/Partido Nacional de Renovação*; ARM: *Agrupación de Electores Ruiz Mateos*; E2000: *España 2000*; EPEN: EPEN (Εθνική Πολιτική Ένωσις, *Ethniki Politiki Enosis*) FN: *Front National*; GL: *Grupo Independiente Liberal*; LAOS: LAOS (Λαϊκός Ορθόδοξος Συναγερμός, *Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós*); LN: *Lega Nord*; MSI: *Movimento Sociale Italiano*; PxC: *Plataforma per Catalunya*; UDCA: *Union de Défense des Commerçants et Artisans*; UN: *Unión Nacional*.

In Italy, along with the end of its First Republic came a significant restructuring of the party system. This context favored *Movimento Sociale Italiano's* transformation into a new party, *Alleanza Nazionale*, which distanced itself from its previous nostalgic orientation. In the mid-1990s the new party gave up classical fascist principles, but also its anti-capitalism and anti-Americanism, to embrace free market and neoliberal principles. However, original elements such as its populist orientation and xenophobic nationalist discourse remained (Ignazi, 1994; Tarchi, 1997). Led by Gianfranco Fini, *Alleanza Nazionale* joined several electoral coalitions and was part of several Silvio Berlusconi-led governments. In 2007 the party merged into *Forza Italia* (Ignazi, 2005; Ruzza & Fella, 2009). Moreover, Italian *Lega Nord* also appeared in the mid-1990s: a new regionalist party with a clear right-wing radical orientation, but entirely opposed to the tradition represented by *Alleanza Nazionale*. Led by Umberto Bossi, *Lega Nord* successfully mobilized—by means of populist discourse—the richer north's discontent (which self-designated itself as Padania) against the central Italy political elites. *Lega Nord's* program was neoliberal, which paved the way for their successive electoral coalitions and governments along with Berlusconi and Fini's *Alleanza Nazionale* despite their disagreements (Gómez-Reino, 2002; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2010; Bulli & Tronconi, 2011).

In Greece, Portugal and Spain, far-right parties stuck to maximalist and nostalgic discourses, which along with fragmentation and various organizational problems substantially limited their prospects for electoral success (Davis, 1998; Ignazi, 2003, chap. 12). In Greece, various parties such as EPEN (Εθνική Πολιτική Ένωση [Εθνική Πολιτική Ένωση], EPEN in Greek) achieved representation in the 1981 and 1984 European elections. However, they were unable to either gain access to national parliament or to revalidate their European Parliament seats in subsequent elections. In the early 1990s Greek far-right discourse underwent a process of renewal, relegating nostalgic discourse in exchange for nativism and expansionist nationalism fostered by the Balkan crisis. However, none of the main parties or (the then embryonic) Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή, [Χρυσή Αυγή]) obtained electoral representation during this period (Georgiadou, 2013). It was not until 2000 that LAOS (Λαϊκός Ορθόδοξος Συναγερμός [Λαϊκός Ορθόδοξος Συναγερμός; LAOS] in Greek), a party that emerged from a split in the conservative New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία, [Νέα Δημοκρατία] in Greek), first managed to obtain seats in the 2004 European elections, and subsequently in 2007. With a xenophobic discourse clearly focused on immigration, LAOS obtained some electoral success. However, the party ended up being a victim of the political instability produced during the Great Recession due to its support for austerity policies, and it disappeared in 2012 (Ellinas, 2013).

In Spain, parties showing nostalgia for Franco's regime, such as *Fuerza Nueva* or *Falange's* various splits, were unable to achieve parliamentary representation in any electoral arena (general, regional or European), which relegated them to very marginal positions in Spanish politics (Ellwood, 1992; Rodríguez Jiménez, 1994; Casals, 1995; Gallego, 2006). In the late 1980s, several right-wing populist parties appeared in Spanish politics that were able to achieve some electoral relevance. The most important was the *Agrupación Ruiz-Mateos* (ARM), a very leader-centered and populist electoral platform led by a businessman who successfully channeled discontent towards the government and won a seat in the 1989 European elections. ARM did not revalidate its seat in the following elections, but was a sign of the existing potential for a right-wing populism to emerge in Spanish politics. The same discourse was used by another businessman, Jesús Gil, who created a new personal electoral platform during these years. Gil ran *Atlético de Madrid*—a major Spanish football club—for years, and was mayor of Marbella—a major tourist city in southern Spain. However, Gil never managed to make the leap to regional or national politics. The existence of these personalist platforms was a factor hindering the visibility and electoral growth of other far-right parties. On the other hand, during the 1990s there was a generational break within the most nostalgic parties. The younger generations advocated for a discursive renewal on new ideological, cultural and symbolic bases. Francoism was exchanged for neo-Nazi ideas, and strategies for the spread of ideas and for social penetration were copied from hooliganism in football and the skinhead countercultural movement. As a result of this renewal, new parties such as *Democracia Nacional* or *Movimiento Social Republicano* emerged, which were again unable to obtain electoral representation (Casals, 2009; Rodríguez Jiménez, 2013). From the 2000s onwards, new parties emerged that sought to capitalize on the radical right discourse that was beginning to emerge in other European countries. The two most important cases were *Plataforma per Catalunya* and *España 2000*. Both parties sought to mobilize nativist discourses based on welfare chauvinism and Islamophobia, at a time of growing Muslim origin immigration and world-wide war against radical Islamism. Despite the context, neither *Plataforma per Catalunya* nor *España 2000* were able to achieve representation beyond the municipal level (Pardos-Prado & Molins, 2010; Hernández-Carr, 2011; López Ortega, 2017).

Table 2. Main features of southern Europe far right parties until the Great Recession

PARTY	REPRESENTATION	MAIN LEADER	IDEOLOGY	OTHER
<b>AD (G)</b>	-	N. Michaloliakos	Authoritarian Nativist Populist	Anti-communist
<b>AN (G)</b>	E (1981-1984)	S. Stefanopoulos	Nostalgic Nationalist	Anti-communist, monarchical
<b>AN (I)</b>	G (1994-2008)E (1994-2009)	G. Fini	Populist Nativist	
<b>AN/PNR (P)</b>	-	A. Da Crus J. Pinto Coelho	Populist Nativist	Eurosceptic
<b>ARM (E)</b>	E (1989-1994)	J.M. Ruiz-Mateos	Populist	
<b>E2000 (E)</b>	-	J-L. Roberto	Authoritarian Nativist	
<b>EPEN (G)</b>	E (1984-1989)	G. Papadopoulos	Nostalgic Nationalist	Anti-communist
<b>FN (F)</b>	E (1984-) G (1986-1993 i 1997-2002)	J.M. Le Pen	Populist Nativist	Eurosceptic
<b>LAOS (G)</b>	E (2004-2009)G (2007-2012)	G. Karatzaferis	Populist Nativist	Anti-Semitic, Anti-American
<b>LN (I)</b>	G (1992-) E (1989-)	U. Bossi	Populist Nativist	Ethno- regionalist
<b>MSI (I)</b>	G (1948-1994) E (1979-1994)	G. Almirante G. Fini	Nostalgic Nationalist	Anti-American, Anti-capitalist
<b>PxC (E)</b>	-	J. Anglada	Populist Nativist	
<b>UDCA (F)</b>	G (1956-1958)	P. Poujade	Populist	Eurosceptic
<b>UN (E)</b>	G (1979-1982)	B. Piñar	Nostalgic Nationalist	

Source: own elaboration. G: General elections (National elections); E: European elections. For party acronyms see Table 1.

The situation in Portugal was not very different. The gradual increase in immigration and the influence of cultural movements such as hooliganism or skinheads favored a shift in Portuguese far-right groups towards more nativist and neo-Nazi positions. *Movimento de Ação Nacional* was one of the first groups to attempt this transformation, although it remained outside the electoral action (De Almeida,

2015). In late 1990s, members of *Aliança Nacional*, a small group which never managed to register as a political party, infiltrated and took control of a nostalgic party that was inactive at the time. In 2000 the party changed its name to *Partido Nacional de Renovação* (PNR) as well as all its symbolism and discourse, which now focuses on immigration, sexual rights regulation (abortion, same-sex couples), law and order issues and Euroskepticism. PNR never achieved parliamentary representation (Zúquete, 2007; Marchi, 2019).

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s all southern Europe countries experienced an increase in political violence with connections to hooliganism in football, skinhead countercultural movements, or small groups who openly claimed to be Neonazis (Mudde, 2019, chap. 3 i 5). The connections between these extremist groups and some far-right parties have been studied in the Italian (Caiani & Borri, 2012), Spanish (Casals, 1995; Caiani & Borri, 2012; Rodríguez Jiménez, 2013) and Portuguese cases (Marchi, 2013; De Almeida, 2015). However, one of the most paradigmatic cases is that of Golden Dawn in Greece. Born in the early 1980s, the party (legalized in 1993) has been closely linked to skinhead or neo-Nazi organizations that left a strong imprint on their ideology and styles of action (Ellinas, 2013).

## The fourth wave of radical right-wing parties in southern Europe: the book's structure

This book's aim is to show readers the main radical right-wing parties' evolution in recent years in Spain and southern Europe. The main guiding question throughout the whole research is to point out the impact that the Great Recession has had on these parties. As shown in the different chapters and discussed in the conclusions, organizational discontinuities, the emergence of new actors, or changes in leadership and electoral strategies suggest that during these years there has been a fourth wave of evolution of far-right parties in southern countries of the continent. The emergence of *Vox* or *Chega* in Spain and Portugal respectively, Italian radical right's break up with previous traditions, or the quantitative and qualitative leap experienced by the new Marine Le Pen-led *Front National* are surely good examples of some of the distinctive features of this new stage. In all the studied cases, this political family's political relevance has considerably increased in a context of deep transformation of southern European party systems. (Bosco & Verney, 2012, 2016; Verney & Bosco, 2014; Morlino & Raniolo, 2017; Lisi, 2019).

The book is divided into two major parts. The first part deals with the main radical right-wing parties' evolution in Italy, France and Portugal before and after the economic crisis that hit Europe between the late 2000s and mid-2010s. These chapters, written by leading specialists in the subject, have a similar approach. Electoral and organizational developments, as well as competition strategies are analyzed for the main radical right parties in the context of the party system transformation experienced in each respective countries. All chapters show organizational discontinuities and leadership changes that occurred during these years.

The book's second part focuses on the Spanish case. Unlike the previous one, the different contributions have been selected in order to provide the reader with an interdisciplinary perspective on the phenomenon. This part contains an historic first chapter that shows the Spanish extreme right's different stages. A second text analyzes the main organizational and ideological characteristics to be found in *Vox*, the main radical right-wing party that emerged in Spain during the Great Recession years. A third contribution studies the Spanish party system's fragmentation and growing polarization as one of the main interpretive keys explaining *Vox*'s electoral rise. A fourth contribution focuses on *Vox*'s social media discourse. Finally, a fifth chapter analyzes Valencian extreme right's peculiar evolution from the Transition to democracy until present day. The book ends with conclusions aimed to extract each chapter's main ideas and show some comparative remarks.

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**First Part**

# The radical right in Southern Europe

# The Italian Radical Right: going mainstream?

**Manuela Caiani  
and Tiago Carvalho**

## Introduction

The 2018 general elections in Italy saw the emergence of what has been called the first populist government of Europe (Garzia, 2019). Given the hung parliament after the elections, an alliance between M5S and Lega led to the so-called Government of Change. The new coalition government configuration could be considered part of a broader realignment taking place in the Italian party system post-2008, with the 2013 general elections constituting a turning point. Even if they parted ways after the summer of 2019, the govern experience of Lega under Salvini's leadership made the party the undisputable leader of the right in Italy.

In this chapter we explore the characteristics of the Italian radical right and the complex organisational milieu since 1990s until its current populist form, considering the post-2008 political opportunity structure elements that facilitated its growth and provide the context for its growth into wider relevance in the party system in its current populist form. Additionally, this chapter will examine the relation of the radical right with populism in parties like Lega and its experience in power. As it will be seen, throughout this chapter the Italian radical right is a heterogenous galaxy of actors involving a plurality of actors, from institutional to non-institutional, from offline to online. In what remains of this introduction, we will describe the guiding concepts employed throughout the empirical overview.

## Guiding Concepts

Even though the terms 'extreme right', 'far right', and 'populist radical right' are often used in the literature to refer to the same empirical object, in this chapter we use 'radical right' to refer to those groups that exhibit in their common ideological core the characteristics of nationalism, xenophobia (ethno-nationalist xenophobia), anti-establishment critiques and socio-cultural authoritarianism (law and order, family values) (Mudde 2007). The term extreme right includes groups well beyond the legal boundaries of democratic politics (e.g. violent direct actions or even terrorist attacks). Therefore, we prefer to use the label 'radical right' to describe those parties that are located toward one pole on the standard ideological left-right scale. Recent academic attempts to define the (new) radical right have tended to shift attention from "old" fascism to "new populism". If the "old" radical right was identified with ultranationalism, the myths of decadence and of rebirth, conspiracy theories and anti-democratic stances (Eatwell 2003), then the current "populist radical right parties" (Mudde 2007) combine populist anti-establishment critiques with ethno-cultural nationalism (nativism), xenophobia and socio-cultural authoritarianism (law and order, family values) (Mudde 2007, 21; Rydgren 2007; Loch and Norocel 2015). Populism and ethno-cultural exclusionary nationalism are increasingly indicated among scholars as distinguishing populist radical right parties from parties of the mainstream (Rydgren 2006).

Nonetheless, to fully understand and characterize the ongoing realignment of the Italian landscape, we need to look beyond institutional politics. This entails an analysis of not only the emerging parties, but also radical right grassroots groups and social movements without a clear link with institutional politics (Caiani et al. 2012). Over the last decade, various groups, such as CasaPound, not only became

prominent as they established links with various political parties. With this respect, recent research on the radical-right has tried to close gap between disciplinary approaches that tend to focus either on political parties or on civil society/social movement actors. The adoption and adaptation of the concept of movement-party to characterise these groups and link the two spaces improves our understanding of the current political dynamics (Caiani and Cisar, 2018; Castelli Gattinara and Pirro, 2018a, 2018b). These groups should be considered not only because of their *movement-party* configuration/hybridisation (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro, 2018b), but also due to the importance of these actors in bringing and framing issues that not only reflects a particular context (e.g. migrant/refugee crisis), but also influences the discourses in the public sphere that reaches a wider audience. In fact, the radical-right in Italy comprehends a heterogeneous and diverse space that includes a variety of political parties, social movements and subcultural groups (counter-cultural and anti-systemic) and in recent years situates itself between electoral and protest politics.

## The Radical-Right in Italy

### A Pre-Crisis Overview: a heterogenous galaxy

As it has been noted, the radical right is not an homogeneous 'family' in any European country, and this is even truer in Italy, when the 'galaxy of the radical right is extremely fragmented and includes several different types of groups of institutional, non-institutional and subcultural actors (Caiani and Parenti 2013). Apart from various political parties, its movement network includes 'cultural' associations, revisionist and 'negationist' groups, but also music bands and football ultras. This variety of labels, political parties, groups, and movements exists, often characterized by scarce contact between them and divided by long-standing ideological battles (Caldiron, 2001).

In the 1990s, as the traditional parties vanish, the post-1994 right comes to be dominated by Forza Italia media magnate Silvio Berlusconi for the next 15 years (Pasquino, 2019). Upon this change, Italy was the first European country in the last 50 years in which the radical-right reached full political and institutional recognition, with a stable presence in centre-right governments after 1994 (Caldiron, 2001, 15). It could be said that in the 1990s the Italian radical right had two souls. On the one hand, the heirs from the *Movimento Social Italiano* (MSI) - the post-war neo-fascist

party - were strong advocates of "nation-state nationalism, law-and-order policies, and strong family values" (Ruzza, 2018: 506). These were (1) the more "moderate" National Alliance (AN), and (2) *Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore* (founded in 1995 by some ex-AN members who refused to follow AN's path of moderation and distancing from the fascist past). On the other hand, the ethnonationalist parties such as Lega Nord which espouse an independentist and autonomist programme that opposed "nation-state-nationalism, considering the historical process of Italian unification to be fundamentally unsuccessful and misguided" (Ruzza, 2008: p. 507). [Baldini 2001, 2]).

**Table 1. Right-Wing forces results since 1994**

	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008	2013	2018
<b>Forza Italia</b>	21.01	20.57	29.43	23.72			14.43
<b>Alleanza Nazionale</b>	13.47	15.66	12.02	12.34			
<b>Lega (Nord)</b>	8.36	10.07	3.94	4.58	8.3	4.08	17.61
<b>PdL</b>					37.39	21.53	
<b>Fdi</b>						1.95	4.26
<b>Total</b>	42.84	46.3	45.39	40.64	45.69	27.56	36.3

In the 1994 national elections, AN reached 13.5 per cent of the vote and LN 8.4 per cent, forming, together with Forza Italia, Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing coalition. In 1996, both the AN and the LN confirmed their electoral success, gaining respectively 15.7 and 10.1 per cent of the vote. Furthermore, the neo-fascists of MsFt obtained 0.9 per cent (Carter 2005). Both AN and LN occupied important ministerial positions in the Berlusconi government after the 2001 national elections, among them the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence.

This situation also meant that extra-parliamentary radical-right groups could be called as a potentially powerful political ally. As a case in point, the radical right not only includes political parties geared towards elections and public office but also social movements or 'networks of networks' that aim to mobilise public support, and a conglomeration of subcultural groups and groupuscules (Caiani and Parenti 2013; Gattinara et al. 2018).

As far as the extra-parliamentary radical-right is concerned during this period, we can mention *Fronte Sociale Nazionale* (founded in 1997, following a split within the MSI-FT), *Forza Nuova* (originating from the MSI diaspora in the transition to AN), *Liberta` di Azione* (led by Benito Mussolini's grand-daughter, Alessandra), and some very recent groups such as, e.g. *Rinascita Nazionale*. In the category of political groups, we find a series of youth organizations, connected to political parties and some political newspapers. Next to these political parties and movements, we have the category of nostalgic, revisionist, and 'negationist' organisations. These are groups that constantly refer to the 20 years of fascist rule in Italy and the Salo` Republic and that are apologists of Benito Mussolini.

In Italy the radical right is not only highly influential in national politics, but is also characterized by enhanced communication between established political parties and grassroots movements and small counter-cultural groups. In Italy, in fact, populist radical right parties enjoy much electoral support and access to the public sphere, while also maintaining a privileged channel of communication with the social movement arena. In Italy, involvement in the extreme right ranges from activism in the various youth groups associated with the fascist Italian party, MSI, (such as 'Azione Giovani' and 'Azione Studentesca')—which make explicit references to the fascist past (Caldiron 2002, 80)—to the more recent squatted social centres (Di Tullio 2006). A broad range of 'young' and subcultural extreme right organizations includes skinhead groups, politicized hooligans, and music groups, with numerous contacts between them (Caiani and Wageman 2007).

## Online Galaxy

The virtual community of the extreme right in Italy appears highly fragmented, and it is not focused around a few central organizations that are able to monopolize the communicative exchange within the sector. Previous work (Caiani and Parenti 2013) reveals only some political parties (such as for example Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore and Forza Nuova) occupy central positions in the network; most are located on its periphery (see Fronte Sociale Nazionale, Azione Sociale and Rinascita Nazionale). Political party organizations and political movements emerge as split into different clusters within the net; they are not considered as the main points of reference (partners) for contacts with the other Italian extreme right organizations. Rather, the core of the network consists of neo-fascist/neo-Nazi organizations, and some nostalgic and revisionist organizations that have prominence in the network. Second, the overall network of the Italian extreme right

is characterized by a loose chain and a 'policephalous structure' (Diani 2003, 309; Caiani and Wagemann 2009)— that is, both centralized and segmented. Although most of the organizations participate actively in exchanges within the network, many organizations at the periphery are not directly connected with the central ones. Therefore, many actors can only communicate with each other via long paths.

Although no organization is completely isolated from the overall network, it is worth noting the marginal position of the subcultural youth organizations (for example, the websites of the squatters' centres and music groups Casa Pound, Casa Montag, Lorien), which together form a cluster. These types of organizations remain peripheral and are integrated into the network only with a very low number of ties. The impression of a segmented network is confirmed by the average degree, which is 5.3, indicating that every Italian organization has on average around five links with other organizations. Finally, the online network of the Italian extreme right has a moderate level of centralization. The level of segmentation in a network reflects the degree to which communication between actors is hindered by barriers. These may reflect ideological differences between various actors or may be due to varying levels of concern for a particular policy (Diani 2003, 306).

Yet another category of the galaxy of the Italian radical-right contains neo- Nazi groups and websites. The main difference from neo-fascists groups is that these websites did not refer to contemporary political intervention (Caiani and Parenti, 2013). These refer to German National Socialist ideology, the Third Reich, and Hitler. Furthermore, it is possible to identify a broad range of 'young' sites that includes skinhead, hooligans, and music groups. These groups consider music and sport as their main interests, and their sites were characterized by fascist or Nazi symbols or by symbols taken from Celtic mythology. Contacts between skinheads and some football hooligan groups were frequent (Gnosis 2006). Finally, organizations that collect and sell military souvenirs (e.g. uniforms) ('militaria') also existed.

The main issues of the revisionist and 'negationist' websites are historical revisionism and the denial of the holocaust; the proposal to re-write history; and the documentation of the crimes of communism. Furthermore, there are some more specifically cultural organizations which can be divided between traditional associations and New Age and 'neo-mystic' groups. Above all, the latter are characterized by their frequent reference to Celtic mythology or a kind of new spiritualism that challenges the official Christian religion (Caiani and Kroel 2014).

## Post-Crisis Realignments

A major shift happened in the Italian party system after 2008. Parallel to other southern European countries in the shadow of the Eurozone crisis, decades of corruption, a technocratic government supported by the mainstream parties in Parliament, and the failure of the governing parties to manage the various crisis (economic, refugees and democratic legitimacy), new political parties espousing an anti-establishment populist rhetoric became increasingly visible. It was in 2013, in the most volatile elections to date in Italy, that the backlash against traditional parties and transformation of the party system started to be more clearly identifiable, with a previously bipolar party-system becoming tripolar (Chiaromonte et al., 2018; Garzia, 2019; Pasquino, 2019). Even if without previous representation in the Italian Parliament, the M5S entered the parliament obtaining 25.6% and competing directly with the traditional center-right and center-left coalitions. This result led to a hung parliament without clear majorities. The legislature unfolded with three different governments led by the PD (Letta, Renzi, Gentiloni) supported by other parties. Renzi, who was a popular figure, promoted economic and political reforms, but nevertheless lost the constitutional referendum in December 2016 and resigned. This situation boosted the anti-establishment rhetoric from populist parties and helps explaining the outcome of the 2018 elections (Chiaromonte et al., 2018).

The 2018 elections repeated and reinforced the trends from 2013. It is important to notice that the centre-right runs in an unified coalition that "represented the four 'spirits' of the Italian centre-right, as created 25 years earlier by Berlusconi: the post-fascist area now represented by Fratelli d'Italia (FDI, Brothers of Italy); the post-Christian Democratic Noi con l'Italia-Unione di Centro (NCI-UDC, Us with Italy-Union of the Centre); the pro-free market FI—Berlusconi's own party; and the Lega" (Chiaromonte et al., 2018).

As in 2013, the elections resulted again in a hung parliament that despite the rising prominence of new parties somehow kept the same three poles from 2013. Nonetheless, there is a major shift towards populist parties with a distinction between "old politics" and "new politics": while the mainstream parties (PD and FI) lost seats, the two parties, with different strands of populism, the M5S and Lega improved their results. Furthermore, new cleavages seem to be implicit in the results: while the results of Lega seem to be feed by cultural populism (nativism, anti-immigrants), the voters of the M5S follow a political populism (anti-corruption,

anti-establishment, democracy) (Corbetta et al., 2018). Despite the differences between the two parties, after months of negotiations, there was an agreement on forming a coalition government.

It is important to notice that the results of the right did not improve in comparison with the 1990s. The difference is that there is a shift in the pole - the Lega under Salvini becomes prominent. Nonetheless, data seems to suggest that the realignment is far from finished and that Lega might become the hegemonic actor (Chiaromonte et al., 2018).

### **From liberal to neo-fascist?**

It could be argued that the transformation of the right-wing pole in Italy is going from liberal, under Berlusconi, to "neo-fascist". This is turn is marked by the increasing relevance of grassroots groups and hegemony of Lega at institutional level (De Giorgi and Tronconi, 2018). As stated before, the radical right in Italy is a heterogeneous space and after the crisis the increasing relevance of political parties such as FdL, Fratelli d'Italia and Lega, but also by grassroots activism like CasaPound (Caiani et al. 2012; Gattinara et al., 2018).

In 2007, a new federation of political parties on the right (which included Forza Italia and National Alliance) - People of Freedom - was created with the purpose of reinforcing their joint position in the upcoming 2008 elections. The next year, this federation merged into a new political party, with all the parties disbanding. Nonetheless, Forza Italia was revived in 2013 and PdL became again a centre-right coalition, while the former members of the National Alliance formed a new party called *Fratelli d'Italia* with clear neo-fascist inclinations. Until the demise of Berlusconi (due to corruption scandals), this coalition of conservatives/old-fashioned fascists and liberals ruled the country for 20 years (Ruzza, 2018).

Over the last decade, with the demise of Berlusconi, Lega became the leader of the right-wing pole. Quite interestingly, not only Lega is not a new party as it is currently the oldest party in Italy. Created in the 1980s as a regional party defending the independence of Padania (Northern Italy), it integrated Berlusconi Forza Italia governments since the 1990s. In fact, during this period, even if espousing an ethnonationalist position, it converged with the neoliberal ethos of Forza Italia (Ruzza, 2018).

However, the Lega did not have an easy path after the burst of the 2008 crisis. Amidst a corruption scandal the party crumbles in the 2013 elections: from 2008 when their results amounted to 8.3% (60 seats), they face a steep decline in 2013 where they had 4.09% (18 seats). Nonetheless, Matteo Salvini, a long-time party member, became the leader of Lega in 2013 and redefined the party's image in the Italian political landscape: instead of a regionalist party, the party focuses now on Europe and immigration to the image of *Front Nationale* in France and leaves aside their northern credentials to target the whole country. This could be summed up as nationalising and de-territorialisation while integrating "transnational" influences (Caiani 2018b).

This redefinition of their image was initiated with the creation of a sister-party (Us with Salvini) in southern Italy, to give the idea that the party's "enemy" was not the south anymore. Moreover, in 2017 they ditched the word north from their name and Salvini started a campaign to become prime-minister, while reinforcing their nativist and law-and-order radical-right positions.

In the 2018 general elections, after running in a coalition with other right-wing parties (FI, FdL, Us with Italy), they become the 3rd largest party in Parliament and the "leader" of right-wing pole. Lega becomes the main force within the coalition dethroning Berlusconi's leadership. This strategy led to an increase in voting, with 17.4% and 125 of the seats in Parliament. Since the elections, and assuming office, Lega became the leading party in the polls.

But the crisis also led to a re-emergence and re-creation of the neo-fascist right, such as CasaPound and Forza Nuova, who keep connections with Lega and FdL (De Giorgi and Tronconi, 2018; Froio and Gattinara, 2015; Gattinara et al., 2018). Created in 2003, but getting its official status as an "association of social promotion" only in 2008, CasaPound is a political group that originates from pre-existing neo-fascist parties (Caiani and Parenti 2013) and connects subcultural activities (such as music), with grassroots activities and political actions. It assumes itself as a fascist movement (rejecting left-right labels) and opposes neoliberalism, with its discourse being "largely inspired by the experiences of 1970s youth Neo-Fascism, thus attracting both nostalgic Neo-Fascists and younger recruits". (Gattinara et al. 2018). It is important to notice that their activities and discourses are not solely cultural or nativist in nature, but in fact their members claim that the group started due to the poor housing conditions for the Italians. Moreover, they promote an anti-liberal and anti-EU stance. Gattinara et al. (2018) point out that their ideology is a kind of fascism *a la carte* that picks up on aspects of fascism that fit the

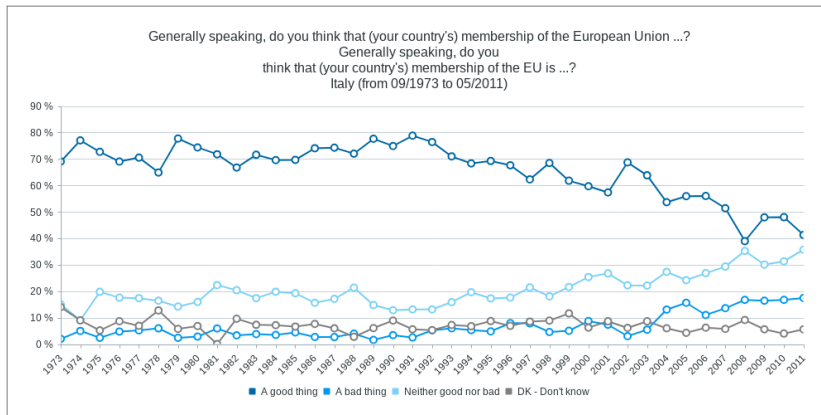
current political environment, while leaving aside proposals that could endanger the group's legitimacy. They situate themselves between protest and electoral politics (despite the little success in the latter) fitting the definition of movement-party given in the introduction.

It is important to notice that CPI often allies with Lega Nord: "Lega Nord needed CasaPound and its network of associations, sport clubs and concert halls to extend its influence on southern regions in Italy, while CasaPound benefited from the nation-wide visibility offered by the joint-venture with a formerly governing party. For Lega Nord, this meant abandoning its original secessionist stances in favour of a new, nationalist rhetoric based on full-fledged Euroscepticism. For CasaPound, instead, this alliance enabled approaching topics that – until then – had been tackled only marginally by the group, most notably the immigration issue" (Froio and Gattinara, 2015). Furthermore, as De Giorgi and Tronconi (2018) argue: "the resurgence of the radical-right represents a new reality and a possible source of danger but also of opportunity, especially for the League and Fdl. The importance (only in terms of media coverage for the time being) of political groups that until now have been marginalized suggests that there is a growing electoral pool into which the mainstream parties might be able to reach. However the new competitors on the political scene might pull consensus away from the center-right parties or restrict their room for maneuver. And all this exists without even considering the serious questions and concerns that the legitimization of these political groups must raise about the state of health of Italian democracy".

## **Nativist turn and Europe**

Since 2008 that the EU played an increasingly significant role in domestic politics in the Southern European countries. Three crises play an important role in the discursive opportunities taken by the parties that now dominate Italian politics: eurozone, migrant/refugee crisis and democratic legitimacy (Gattinara, 2017). In addition to these overlapping crises that affected the country and are linked to the EU, in the context of the Eurozone crisis, the country had a technocratic government implementing a program directly linked to the EU.

Figure 1. Attitudes towards the EU in Italy (1973-2011)



Source: Eurobarometer 1973-2011

Figure 1 shows that since the early 2000s increasingly less Italians consider the membership of the EU a good thing. If until the beginning of the century approval values averaged around 70%, in the peak of the crisis in 2011 it was circa 40%. This fact opens the discursive structure of opportunities for the emergence of Eurosceptic positions at the national level, an issue that was consensual until very recently.

Pirro and Kessel (2017) argue that populist actors frame these crises as a way to "voice dissent against the EU". Salvini's discourse is clearly sovereigntist and nativist using the expression "Italian's First". He criticizes Europe for "consisting of bureaucrats and technocrats who work against the real interests of the European people(s)" (Pasquino, 2019). In this context it is important to mention, that in the ongoing process of realignment, given the opportunity structure, the emergence of tensions and conflicts "may also have consequences going beyond the domestic context. If the eurosceptic parties continue to prevail, the relationship between Italy and the EU will undergo increasing tensions and may even put at risk the very existence of the Union in its present form" (Chiaromonte et al., 2018).

Following Bressanelli and de Candia (2019) it could be argued that the positions taken on the EU by Lega reflects the strategies and electorates at the national level, which is directly translated into their current politics of alliances at the European level. Corbetta and colleagues (2019), based on Lega electoral results

of 2018, show that Lega explores cultural populism (nativism) in their alliances and criticism of the EU making alliances with nativist parties across Europe.

Under Salvini's leadership, Lega went from being a regionalist party, that focus on the interests of northern Italy and demanding independence for the so-called region of Padania, to become a national party. This scale-shift led also to a change and transformation of the frames and discourses of the party: the party de-nationalisation created a new "enemy", as the establishment is now considered the EU that acts against the interests of the Italians instead of Rome. However, it was not the crisis that triggered the nativist and anti-Europe turn as their position was already slowly shifting since the 1990s from an EU-optimist organisation to an Eurosceptic one.

In the 1990s, given their regional views, they criticized the "undemocratic super-state" that acted against the interests of European people. Nevertheless, until the eruption of the crisis, the party never called for an exit from the EU or the Eurozone as "neither the EU nor its policies were deemed directly responsible for the economic situation of the country" (Pirro and Kessel, 2017). The radicalisation of their discourse against the EU comes after 2013 with the election of Salvini as party leader. Austerity and European policies were now deemed responsible for the crisis at the national level and the party called for an exit of the EU and the Eurozone. Pirro and Kessel suggest that this radicalisation can be "read through the domestic political context" as the EU-loyalty amongst voters declined and opened the way for these frames to become prominent. It is also important to note that due to their affiliation to center-right coalition, during the electoral period of 2018 they had to restrict their more eurosceptic views. Nonetheless, after the elections and as they become the major party of the coalition and integrate government they became less restrained in their critiques to the EU and use it for electorate purposes.

In terms of their affiliation in the European Parliament, until the emergence of crisis, Lega Nord was part of various groups. If initially these were pro-European groups, the party slowly integrates eurosceptics ones. Following the 2009 European elections the party joined the newly created "Europe of Freedom and Democracy" integrated by parties like UKIP and The True Finns. In the 2015, the party integrates the Europe of Nations and Freedom, a radical-right alliance led by Le Pen and Wilders. In line with this, Lega's European elections manifesto stressed the role of their Christian roots, the defense of national identity, underlining the supremacy of the Italian constitution over European directives. As a consequence, these manifesto was strongly against immigration, EU integration and austerity policies.

## Populist Radical Right in Power: what consequences?

As the South of Europe was hit the hardest by the 2008 financial crisis and recession many people saw living standards shrink, the centrist parties that had governed hitherto – and the Eurocrats in Brussels with their clipboard austerity – became an obvious target. In Italy, decades of corruption, mismanagement and the impact of the 2015 refugee crisis resulted in the anti-establishment, tax-and-spend Five Star Movement sweeping to power last year in an unlikely coalition with the far-right, anti-immigration Lega. More specifically, in the 2018 Italian general election the outsider Five Star Movement improved its performance since last 2013 national elections (from which their already received a strong political legitimation as the third most important party of the country) by obtaining 32% of votes. In the same elections, the radical right populist party Lega (for more details see Caiani 2019) reached an unprecedented 17%. The M5S and the Lega despite long negotiations, ultimately joined forces to implement a shared government agenda: an 'all-populist' government (Pirro, 2018). As such, the current Italian government is based on a fragile, strategic, convenient, but also conflictive compromise between two forms of populism. In this section we will focus on the policies of the cabinet and the influence of Lega in the government.

In what concerns, *the welfare and social policies* of the 5SM-League coalition cabinet in Italy are marked not only by an overall turn against austerity measures of previous cabinets, but also by an overt conflict with the EU budgetary rules, which could be interpreted as, overall, regarding both parties, a typical anti-elitist populist position translated at the supranational instead of national level. Their government program and inauguration stated explicitly the objective of fulfilling their electoral promises of recovering the Italian economy and to move Italians out of poverty. As a result, in January 2019, the government announced two major reforms: the citizens' income (an old M5S promise which Di Maio called a "New Welfare System")<sup>1</sup> and the pension reform. These two measures were core electoral promises of each party, since as stressed in a joint press conference in 2019 "Italy can't concentrate only on financial stability, we also need to look at social stability" (Speak, 2019). In addition, these policies target the specific electorate of each party: while the Citizens Income is directed towards the poorest populations of the south that tendentially votes for the M5S, the pensions reform targets Lega's oldest voters.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Citizens' Income consists of a "basic monthly income, provided recipients actively seek work" (Adler, 2018). However, this policy as drafted it is not a universal basic income, but rather a new policy scheme designed to support those citizens living below the poverty line (Girardi, 2019). It is also important to notice the discourse behind the promotion of this new programme, as the government stresses that it is for "Italians only" (even if it is available to non-EU foreigners if they are residents for 10 years).*

In terms of *immigration and integration policies*, the coalition program, with Minister of the Interior under Salvini's command, targeted this issue directly, with a nativist turn. The Lega's action on immigration policies stretches between *i.* punctual sensationalist actions and announcements (or propaganda), and *ii.* securitization and criminalization decrees that effectively reduce migrants' rights. In the former we found repeated episodes such of closing down ports to refugees boats or announcing a census of Roma people (which did not happen); in the latter we find decrees (as the so called so-called Salvini's decree, in Fall 2018) that narrow asylum rights, prevent rescue at sea and punish survivors and rescuers. In details, the decree led to: (1) the restriction to "obtain a humanitarian visa to remain in Italy" if not related with political reasons or war; (2) the limitation of adequate shelter for asylum seekers; (3) the doubling of the amount of time people can be detain before deportation (90 to 180 days); and (4) the expansion of the list of offenses for which refugee status can be revoked, allowing the dismissal of asylum claims (it is enough to be charged) (Sunderland, 2018). Furthermore, the Minister of the Interior legitimizes the measures with a discourse that classifies migrants and asylum seekers as criminals, and connects migrants with the mafia and people's smugglers (Zampano, 2018). In the case of Lega, it radicalises its public populist discourse on migration, while materialising it on policy-making as shown above.

## Conclusion

As Ruzza points out: "the recent trajectory of the Italian radical right and its main formations - FdL and LN - is marked by the loss of relevance of Berlusconi's party following the 2013 elections and the expulsion of Berlusconi from the Senate after he was found guilty of tax evasion" (Ruzza, 2018: 508). Together with the crisis ridden demise of Berlusconi, it should also be taken into account Lega's process of rebranding under Salvini's leadership, Lega became the main right-wing party. Even if currently the Italian right has a smaller share of the votes than in the 1990s, there was a rupture with liberal politics of Forza Italia and a radicalisation towards radical-right, nativist and eurosceptic positions, with an increasing visibility of neo-fascist grassroots movements and collaboration with institutional actors which constitute an important auxiliary force on the ground (De Giorgi and Tronconi, 2018).

Moreover, it could be argued that the realignment process is still underway, and more changes will be seen in the future as the ongoing political process unfolds. After the 2019 European elections Salvini's European elections striking win (34%) the 'bloc'

of right consolidated under his leadership. Until the breakdown of Government of Change in the summer of 2019, Salvini's message gave voice to a social bloc that was infused with fear and with poverty. Salvini's strategy occupied the media and built a political hegemony over the center-right and the 5SM, with a lib-pop agenda that mixed liberalism with populism in social policies, i.e., while attempting to liberalize the economy, he would provide the support to the middle-class and the losers of globalisation in the midst of his profusing immigration campaign. We will now need to wait to see what happens.

In Italy, as for the *public discourse* on sensitive topics for populists such as immigration, we have to consider that the refugees crisis had a strong and concrete impact on the country, fueling a discourse against immigrants which is at the basis of the Lega positions (and, partially, the M5S). Lega espouses a clearly nativist view which puts the "Italian first", however much of this public discourse was already present before the coalition government, fueled by the emergence of Salvini as leader of Lega. Ultimately, Lega makes use of immigration to engage in a conflict with the EU. Holding to their Eurosceptic credentials in government, Lega's objective is to change the European institutions from the inside (Jones, 2018).

Finally, even if in Italy, (radical right) populism is not attempting to change and control country institutions. Nonetheless, in the report from the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2018 Democracy index shows a drop of the country from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 33<sup>rd</sup> position, since, as commented Italy appears characterized by "increasing support for 'strongmen' who bypass political institutions" (The Local, 2019). In addition, the use of anti-migrants/foreigner rhetoric reveals a disregard from civil and humanitarian rights (The Local, 2019).

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As good as new?

# The Radical Right in France in the context of the 2019 European elections

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## Introduction

Over the last five decades, the radical right in France has been principally embodied by a single party: the National Front. The National Front was created in 1972 to run in the 1973 legislative elections. As such, it was meant to act as the electoral face of the 'New Order' (in French: 'Ordre Nouveau'), a nationalist movement which was then acting using violent means, targeting especially the communists in France. Jean-Marie Le Pen was then chosen to head the party. A former MP of the 'Poujade movement' - which was claiming to defend traders and craftsmen – and a fierce defender of 'French Algeria', he had previously worked as campaign manager of the extreme-right candidate Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour in the 1965 Presidential election. Contrary to most other radical right parties in Europe and despite its clear

ostracization on the French political scene, the FN never really disappeared from the French political scene as of the 1980s. If the party first managed to obtain good electoral results at the local level through electoral alliances, anchoring itself in the Southeast, North and Paris region, it then gained ground at the national level. In the past five years, the party has finished first in the polls in a number of elections: the departmental and regional contests of 2015, the European elections of 2014 and 2019. While in 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen's access to the second round of the major election in the country, the Presidential one, stirred much emotion, Marine Le Pen's repeat of this deed 15 years later (in 2017) came as no surprise. In many ways, political competition in France is now largely organized around and as a reaction to the FN irresistible ascension.

For over a century, the traditional right-left divide had provided an adequate picture of the French political space (Andersen & Evans, 2003: 172). Further, in France, for more than three decades, the focus of political analysis has most often been on the left. France was indeed often looked at for the specificity of its left wing, not its right wing, whereas political events have forced to change this perspective. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, we started to speak about the 'tripartition' of the French political field, a denomination based precisely on the appearance of the FN. Tripartition is the idea that the political space is divided into three blocs: the left, the moderate-right and the extreme-right political blocs. While all other parties were either based on old cleavages (especially the social class and religious one in France) or entered them, the FN is considered in this depiction as intrinsically different.

Not only can the radical right in France be reduced to a single party, but moreover it can be coined as a dynastic party with just two Presidents over the almost 50-year period of its existence. Jean-Marie Le Pen has been replaced by his daughter Marine Le Pen in 2011. In 2018, she changed the name of the party to National Rally (*'Rassemblement National'*). It should further be noted that in the French context, we do not speak about the radical right but rather about the extreme right. The 'ultra-right' is sometimes used to qualify all the movements that are more on the right than the FN. This distinction is made based on the fact that the latter aims at attaining power through democratic institutions.

This chapter looks at the breakthrough of the Front National in France in four different perspectives. It first considers the context and main factors that can be identified as key to its most recent electoral successes. It then underlines its main organizational features and details how they have evolved. Third, it expounds on

the electoral performances of the party overtime. Last but not least, the chapter explores the major consequences of the presence and breakthrough of the party on the broader party system, before we conclude.

## Out of minds but not out of sight: explaining the irresistible rise of the National Front

In 2002, the FN begat the main political earthquake in recent French political history by making it to the second round of a Presidential election. In 2017, it renewed this feat but this time creating no surprise among the observers nor on the part of its opponents, which all ran the campaign with the hope of making it to the second round to face Marine Le Pen. The evolution of the National Front is both quintessential of that of the far right in recent Europe and at the same time very peculiar, as it is enshrined in the French political and party system. This section sets out to detail the context and main factors that that have been pointed out as the key elements of its emergence and breakthrough. The gradual, although non-linear, emergence of the FN and its evolution up to the current situation can be interpreted as the result of several elements: its establishment through electoral alliances, its reverse of fortunes along the lines of the electoral system, and the party's own strategy.

A first series of factors often underlined in the literature when it comes to understanding the gradual emergence of the FN is the strategies of other parties toward it. In the 1980s and up to 1998, the traditional right decided to open the door for punctual pre-electoral alliances with the FN. Although, it should be underlined that such agreements took place at the local and regional levels only, and mostly with the strategic aim of preventing the left to win the elections, they have spilled much ink and resulted in party splits both in the FN and the mainstream right parties. Ivaldi (2007) describes how, election after election, the undecidedness of the main right wing parties - but also of the FN itself - led to isolated experiment with power through electoral alliances. All in all, the 'untidiness' of the right, or in other words, the absence of a clear position on their part, kept the FN on a drip.

Second, as electoral alliances do not happen in a vacuum, the French electoral and party system and changes therein also account for the FN's evolution. France has historically used a two-round majoritarian system, which is known to produce party systems with numerous parties, but highly dependent on each other, while retaining

the logic of dualism (in particular through the exclusion of the representation of medium parties that do not have allies) (Duverger, 1951) - being thus overall very detrimental to the FN. Unlike other radical right political forces, the FN seldom made it to Parliament. In view of the 1986 legislative elections, François Mitterrand famously reverted the electoral formula, introducing for the first and only time in the Vth Republic, a party-list proportional representation system. Although his overarching intention was to limit the defeat of his own camp, two main consequences are generally highlighted: the establishment of the first 'cohabitation' regime, where the President and the Prime Minister (a position that was then granted to Jacques Chirac) were from different blocs, and the entry into parliament of the FN. The FN thus entered the National Assembly for the first time with 35 MPs, as well as became one of the main opposition forces. Although this experiment was essentially one-shot and immediately reverted for the next legislative elections in 1988, it left many traces in French politics. Yet another aspect of the electoral system that made possible the rise of a third party is the "triangulaires". "Triangulaires" are essentially a specificity in the electoral system that is now used in legislative, regional, departmental and municipal elections, allowing a third party to make it to the second round in case it reaches a minimum threshold in the first round. In that regard, the revival of the party since 2012 is also often attributed to the overall shift of the party system, which can be partly attributed to the attitude of the right under Nicolas Sarkozy. Somewhat paradoxically, this shift occurred when the FN was at its lowest. In 2007, De Lange concludes her paragraph on the FN by stating that "there seems to be little chance that the FN will be integrated in the French party system in the near future" (pg.31). That year 2007 has since been analysed as a rupture election which brought about a realignment of the party system (Labouret, 2014). In this view, it came from within the party system, and more precisely from Nicolas Sarkozy's 'race to the right' strategy which brought closer the electorates of the UMP and FN parties.

A third outstanding parameter explaining the rise of the FN in France is undoubtedly its own strategy and the evolution of this strategy over time. For long, the FN was ostracised, seen essentially as a xenophobic and anti-semitic party (De Lange, 2007). 'De-demonization' (in French: '*dédiabolisation*') is the term most commonly used to designate the process of change initiated since the change of leadership in 2011 – in other words, it is the lexical standard of Marine Le Pen's strategy of power conquest (Dézé, 2015). It can however hardly be considered as a new strategy as the FN was created as a party to be the more frequentable public face of the movement *Ordre Nouveau* (*Ibid.*). It shows, however, how the change of presidency was accompanied by an adverted change of discourse, that in fact mostly consists in

a change of priorities. The party's discourses are now mostly about multiculturalism and uprooting, meaning that the FN redirected the focus on promoting ethno-differentialism (Biard, 2019) – as opposed to universalism. Such discursive change seems to make the party more frequentable. For a long time, it did not only act as a foil for mainstream parties but also for possible partners in Europe. Before 2014, the party was never part of a party-based EP group, only occasionally joining technical groups. In 2015, it manages to be the uniting force behind the building of a parliamentary group in the European Parliament: the Europe of Nations and Freedom group (ENF). The main reason why the group was not created at the beginning of the legislature but a year later is the unwillingness of a number of parties to join a group under the leadership of the FN which is seen as an anti-Semitic party. In 2019, although the leadership of the new Identity and Democracy group (ID) group came in the hands of Matteo Salvini and his Lega party, the FN was seen as a natural ally and the group is commonly presented as the successor of the ENF.

## The main organizational features

It is possible to analyse the organization of the FN/RN across different steps (phases), three in particular: 1) From 1972 to 2011; 2) from 2011 to 2018; 3) from 2018 until now.

The FN/RN represents now a constant presence in national party system because it has been able to establish itself as a significant force in French politics. According to a large literature on party institutionalization (Janda 1980, Harmel & Svasand 1993), the French FN/RN can be considered institutionalized from 1980s and showing both electoral stability as well as organizational continuity over time. Since Marine Le Pen's ascension to the party leadership in 2011, the FN has entered a new stage of its political development, indicating its ability to survive to its founding/leader. Other phase started in 2018 when the same Marine Le Pen made the decision to change the name of the party from "Front National" to "Rassemblement National".

Already from its first period (founding time), the party has been characterized by "charismatic" central office and populist traits (Ivaldi 1998). In particular the FN organization has been typified by high centralization of power, personal charisma of its leader, top-down relations between the central office and its local branches, and the lack of intra-party democracy. The effective decision-making power has been concentrated in the hands of the national leadership. For nearly four decades,

Jean-Marie Le Pen has fulfilled the function of personifying the party in the media and demonstrating an authoritarian form of political leadership. Also, Le Pen was able to forge a strong affective bond with party members, leading in many cases to a cult of the leader (Ivaldi 1996).

During the 1980s the party was transformed into a permanent organization and authority was concentrated in the party chairman and the Secretary-General, Jean-Pierre Stirbois, who both decided party policy, communication, and strategy. In particular, in 1988 the national structure became more elaborate with the creation of the General Delegation (*Délégation générale*), with the aim to formulate policy and to organize the ideological training of party members. By the early 1990s, the FN had set up a more complex national organization, including executive and representative bodies, and local federations across all 96 metropolitan departments. In any case, the organizational structure of the party reflected its highly centralized system of power.

The early 2000s saw the rise of Marine Le Pen within the party. The electoral debacle of 2007 where Jean-Marie Le Pen received only 10.4 per cent of the presidential vote accelerated the transformation of the FN. Marine Le Pen emerged as the most serious contender for taking over the party and began to organize her faction through "Génération Le Pen", a think-tank created in 1998.

The 2011 party congress represented probably the first most important change in the French Front National organizational path, with Marine Le Pen taking over the party (Ivaldi & Lanzone, 2018: 141). Following Jean-Marie Le Pen's decision to step down, the FN had initiated an internal leadership campaign. During the internal campaign, Marine Le Pen had indicated that she would set up a professionalized and more effective party organization. By 2011, the FN had experienced its first change of leadership since 1972, together with a new executive team.

The FN under Marine Le Pen has pushed an agenda of de-demonization, which aims primarily at shedding its extreme-right profile and to achieve credibility. The FN during 2000s shows the continuation of Le Pen's familial model of authoritarian leadership and the persistence of a highly centralized hierarchical party organization. The centralization of power has taken the form of a 'Marinization' of the party, both internally and externally. The personalization process increased in the 2012 legislative election when the FN was incorporated into the "Rassemblement Bleu Marine" (RBM), a coalition with other minor Eurosceptic parties and personalities outside the FN (Perrineau, 2014).

The 2011 statute complemented the rules of procedure (Règlement intérieur) in force since 2007. The most significant change concerned the new role of "Honorary President" (Président d'honneur), entrusted to Jean-Marie Le Pen whereby he would become an ex officio member of all executive bodies. In practice, however, the Honorary President would have only a formal role, with no significant decision-making power. Moreover, the 2011 statutes confirmed the concentration of power into the triangle consisting of the Political Bureau, the Executive Bureau, and the party chairman (Bureau Politique, Bureau Exécutif, Président) while neutralizing the role of the General Delegation.

Under Marine Le Pen, the FN has also distanced itself from the small neo-fascist groups that had continued to orbit around the party. The 2014 party congress confirmed the rise of a younger cohort of FN elites such as Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, David Rachline, and Nicolas Bay. The 2015 (in the same years was approved a new statute version, with no significant organizational changes) departmental elections revealed that of all French parties, the FN had the highest proportion (about a fifth) of local candidates under-35. This corroborates that the FN under Marine Le Pen is drawing greater support from younger voters (Stockemer & Amengay, 2015).

A new party statute has been approved in 2018<sup>1</sup>. The most important change is about the party appellation "National Rally" (*Rassemblement National*). It is the first time, since its foundation in 1972, the party changed its name and partly its emblem, too. The same changing represents the last step in the de-demonization strategy with a clear aim to leave its memory in term of electoral strategy (marketing campaigning) but not in term of party's ideological core. Also, under an organizational point of view, the new statute does not propose significant changes in party structure.

Under this new look, the RN is planning an effective and aggressively campaigning for the March 2020 municipal elections. It comes after the party's success in 2019 European Elections, in which it won 23 per cent of the national vote, conquering a significant role inside the European Parliament.

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<sup>1</sup> Here is the full text of Party Statute (1<sup>st</sup> June 2018): <https://rassemblementnational.fr/statuts-du-rassemblement-national/> (last seen: 10<sup>th</sup> february 2020).

## The electoral performances of the National Front: an almost linear breakthrough

From its creation until the mid-1980s, the party somewhat stumbles. It did not participate in the 1979 EP elections after failing to constitute a list with the Party of New Forces (Parti des forces nouvelles). Similarly, it did not run in the 1981 presidential elections as Jean-Marie Le Pen did not gather the required number of signatures to be able to stand as a candidate. Instead, its establishment as a political force rather dates back from the 1983 municipal elections, where a consolidation in the polls is made visible. Much like in 1977, FN candidates ran on RPR/UDF lists in a few municipalities in the Southeast, returning a few local councilors. It is mostly Jean-Marie Le Pen himself who received some echo; running as a separate list in Paris' popular 20th arrondissement. He came third with 11.3 % of the votes in the first round. For the first time, the party thus made it to a second round in a 'triangulaire', although gathering less votes than (8.5 %). A few months later, a municipal by-election took place in Dreux that split much ink: the FN candidate, Jean-Pierre Stirbois, who was also the secretary general of the party at the time, received 16.7 % of the suffrages and succeeded in making it to the second round. To impede the left from winning, the RPR/UDF list made an alliance with the FN, offering them several eligible spots, and won the election. As such, the party at the time is often viewed as being Paris-centered in this first decade of its existence (Delwit, 2012: 16). Also, assessments and predictions of its progress in the polls are made difficult by the fact that for a long time the party did not run in all constituencies, thus returning rather low score at the national level.

Arguably, its first countrywide electoral breakthrough occurred at the European elections of 1984 where it gathered 11.0 % of the votes. Its good electoral fortune in secondary elections was confirmed in March 1986 when the FN wins 9.8 % of the votes in the regional elections. Yet, perhaps most significantly, it also retained 9.7 % of the electorate on the same day in the legislative contest. Due to the above-mentioned change in the electoral formula toward a PR system, the party then received 35 seats in the National Assembly, the French lower chamber.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, the FN was confronted to a "glass ceiling" (Mayer, 2015): the party progress in the polls slowed down and it is confronted to many impediments. While obtaining the exact same score than in 1986 (9.6 %), it returned only one MP (losing 34) following the 1988 legislative elections with the reverse of the electoral system back to a traditional French majoritarian formula. The municipal elections of 1995 - where it managed to increase its electoral anchorage

to almost 1,300 local councilors (see: Ivaldi, 2005) throughout the country - opened a new period for the party. Not only was the party able to be in the second round in 100 communes, but it conquered three municipalities<sup>2</sup>: Marignane, Orange and Toulon, the latter being one of the 20 most populous city of the country.

A pivotal year in the FN's electoral history is undoubtedly 1998, where two major events occurred. On one hand, the 1998 regional elections is the last time electoral coalitions were concluded between the mainstream right parties and the FN. While the phenomenon had become quite common in the 1980s and somewhat stumbled at the beginning of the 1990s, the recent victory of the left in the legislative elections pushed the right party UDF to seek the support of the FN in eight of the 22 metropolitan regions of France (see: De Lange, 2007: 29). In five cases this support allowed the UDF to seize the presidency of the regions through post-electoral coalitions with the FN. It however led to major and costly splits within the UDF as well as to a change of the electoral system for elections at this tier of government. On the one hand and relatedly, the party split partly on this issue of alliances. While first threatening its very existence, the split eventually allowed it to get back to its grassroots. In a first period, both 'new' parties following the split underwent a drawback compared to the scores of the unitary FN beforehand. In 1999, the FN recorded its worst result in an EP election, with only 5.7 %. A more limited but still visible decline occurred at the municipal (and "cantonales" – i.e. departmental) elections of 2001.

Despite and maybe thanks to this blackballing, a second breakthrough happened in 2002 when Jean-Marie Le Pen made it to the second round of the French Presidential election polling at 16.9 %. Although the increase in the share of votes of the FN at the time is not particularly spectacular (+ 1.9 percentage points compared to the 1995 presidential contest), it allowed Jean-Marie Le Pen to defeat the socialist candidate and outgoing Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. In many respects, this situation marked a major turn in French political history, raising awareness on the strength of the radical right and leading to many demonstrations throughout the country. The union behind Jacques Chirac allowed him to defeat his competitor by a wide margin in the second round (82.2 %). Less than one percent of the electorate that did not voted for him in the first round thus joined Le Pen for the second one (17.8 %). In the legislative elections that traditionally follow the presidential ones, the FN was assigned to the third place. With 11.3 % of the votes, it was down compared to the presidential contest but also compared to the previous 1997 legislative elections

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<sup>2</sup> In a by-election in February 1997, a fourth municipality, Vitrolles, also falls under its rule.

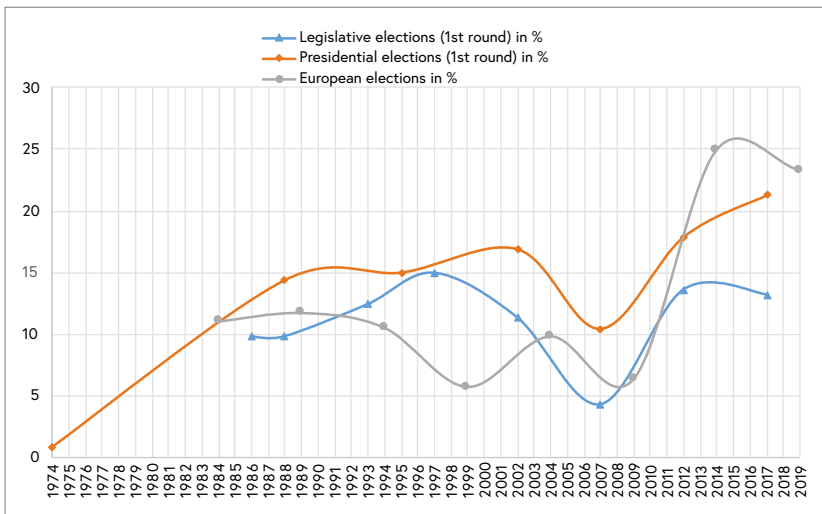
where it had received 15.0 %. The party loses its only seat in the National Assembly, making many analysts to conclude that the party's presence in the second round on the Presidential race was just a flash in the pan.

And indeed, the results of the radical right party rather stagnated in the next decade. In the 2004 regional elections, the party received 14.7 % in the first round, making it relatively stable (- 0.2 % compared to the previous regional elections). It succeeded in upholding candidates in the second round where its scores reached 12.4 %, making it the uncontested third party and returning 156 regional councilors. European elections took place less than three months later with 9.8 % of the suffrages being attributed to the radical right party (+ 4.1 percentage points compared to 1999). Largely thanks to the PR system in use at that level, it returned 7 seats (+ 2 seats compared to 1999). It could even be argued that the end of the decade was marked by a decline of the party in the polls. In the presidential and legislative elections of 2007, the FN only gathered 10.4 % and 4.3 % respectively. Jean-Marie Le Pen did not qualify for the second round, nor did the party return any MP for the second time in a row. In 2009, European elections were held with the FN scoring at only 6.3 % (- 3.5 percentage points) and regional ones where it only reached 11.4 % in the first round (- 3.3 percentage points) and 9.2 % in the second one. In the latter, it notably underwent the competition of several other radical rights movements, most of which emerged from splits from the FN itself. At the end of the 2010s, the party was thus rather on a decline electorally, mobilizing around ten percent of the French voters, far from its historical results. Even in those few elections based on propositional representation the party was not particularly successful.

Yet, although the party reached its historical low point in the 2007-2009 period, a major breakthrough took place as of 2012. In the 2012 Presidential elections, the freshly elected new FN President Marine Le Pen received 17.9 % of the votes. This was the best score of the party ever in the first round of a presidential election, thus firmly reestablishing the party at the third place, far ahead of the radical left party Front de Gauche (FG) that came fourth. The following legislative elections confirmed the renewal of the FN; with 13.6 % in the first round and 3.7 % in the second, regaining two MPs. In this context, the double ballot of 2014 appeared as a major test. In March 2014, the FN achieved striking results at the municipal elections. Not only did it take down the mayoral scarf in 11 municipalities (mostly located in the North and Southeast of France). The FN further made significant progress in the shadow the left-right duel and the clear victory of the latter on which most observers focused. As noted by Biard (2019), for the first time the party even won an election in the first round (in Hénin-Beaumont). In May of the

same year, the European elections were held. For the first time in a country-wide election, the radical right party came first with 24.9 %. The party arrived first in five of the eight constituencies, gaining 24 seats (+ 21). This irresistible ascension was not contradicted in the 2017 presidential elections, which witnessed the collapse of the two traditional parties, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Republicans (*Les Républicains*, new name of the *Union pour un mouvement populaire* - UMP). The success of Marine Le Pen who made it to the second round was a concretization of the party's scores at other levels. Despite being largely defeated in the second round, with 33.9 % (to 66.1 % to her concurrent, Emmanuel Macron), this was the best score ever received in a Presidential election by the party. Quite importantly, one month later in the legislative elections, the FN won eight seats. In 2019, the FN established itself at 23.3 % in the EP elections, making it somewhat lower than in 2014 (- 1.6 %), although the rebound of electoral participation in the country meant that the FN attracted more than half a million voters more than in 2014. In other words, the party had not only become the uncontested second political force of the country, it further succeeded as winning every intermediary elections in the last five years (the departmental and regional elections of 2015<sup>3</sup>, the European elections of 2014 and 2019). Since 2019, however, electoral results have rather been declining in the most recent local, departmental and regional contests.

**Figure 1. Electoral results of the National Front in the presidential, legislative and European elections**



<sup>3</sup> The FN receives the highest score as an individual party in both of these elections. The right and the left however formed broad alliances taking over all the departments' presidencies (67 and 30 respectively), as well as the regional one's (8 and 7 respectively).

## Its main impacts so far on the party system

As previously mentioned, the FN/RN represents one of the oldest parties in French political system, showing stability over time. Since 1972, it has experienced only one change at the top and has retained its name since 2018. On the contrary, French political parties are characterized by their instability, organizational weakness, and fragmentation (Knapp, 2002).

The main party of the left, the *Parti Socialiste*, (Socialist Party - PS) was born in 1969 and it faces now with a general crisis characterizing almost all 'socialist family' in Western Europe (internal and external – as electoral weakness). In particular, for the French PS it started from 2009 and culminated in 2017. In the same year, Emmanuel Macron created its electoral machine named "En Marche" (In movement). Having won the presidential election, Macron then needed to ensure a majority in the French Parliament and create a new centrist political party, "LREM" (La République en Marche).

On the other side, the most important 'conservative' party is known as "Les Républicains" (The Republicans). Its most recent leader Nicolas Sarkozy engineered a name change in 2015, designed to distance the new party from the old, the UMP - Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, which had been in crisis since the 2012 election defeat.

Compared with mainstream political actors, the FN/RN seems to be rather a stable and cohesive party. Its model of centralized leadership has been able to maintaining party unity and to confine fractionalization. The current RN is able to show both, continuity and change. Marine Le Pen's accession in 2011 has inaugurated a new phase in the party's history, culminated in 2018 with the creation of the *Ressemblement National*. Marine's agenda of 'de-demonization' captures the dual attempt by the party to achieve agency credibility while preserving its radical right identity (Ivaldi & Lanzone, 2018). The 2011 leadership election, the 2015 statute and then the 2018 new statute attest to the gradual move by the party towards more open party, able to attract youth elites, too.

Under an electoral point of view, it is possible to evaluate the RN impact on national party system, underling two main aspects. According to Panebianco (1988), charismatic parties have a "revolutionary" element which goes against the existing political status and which allows those parties to mobilize voter resentment. So the current RN continues radical policies and strong populist anti-establishment

postures (Ivaldi 2016) but it is not completely able to become a "government force", especially at national level. Indeed, since its municipal victories in 2014, the RN has decided that consolidating its local presence will not only solidify its normalization but also show voters that its representatives appear as good managers. In fact, in the same period, the party made unprecedented electoral results, winning mayoral races in some 12 small and midsize cities. Also, in 2015, the RN won six cantons in French Regions and made further gains in the legislative elections that followed two years later.

Like other actors, the RN faces the paradox of populist parties, which concerns its ideology, strategy, and organization. With respect to the latter, de-demonization must achieve the balance between two contradictory imperatives: on the one hand, the party must continue its move towards organizational "normality" (Mény & Surel, 2002: 251) to enhance its credibility and governmental status; on the other hand, this objective can only be achieved by increasing partisan democracy and pluralism, which could, in turn, affect the party's adaptive capacity stemming from its charisma-based structure.

Moreover, a potential winning position of the RN during Presidential Elections represents a containable danger for French political life especially because of national voting system and two-rounds ballots. In general, the same system is able to maintain some stability and, at the same time, to ensure the continued existence of high number of parties.

Certainly, the current RN remains an important presence in French political system. During the last decade, it has been able to reinforce its role especially thanks to a general populist (and nationalist, too) wave, pervading a large portion of Europe. Under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the party has been consolidated also its role inside the European Parliament, created a new strong EPG<sup>4</sup> and starting significant relationship with other European political forces from the extreme-right area, such as the Italian Northern League, that changed its name simply to League and is lead by Matteo Salvini, the German Alternative for Germany, the Austrian FPÖ or the Flemish *Vlaams Belang*. In view of the forthcoming Presidential Elections (2022), it will be possible to evaluate the evolution in role of the 'new' RN, after its historical results in 2017.

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<sup>4</sup> The EPG was called "Europe of Nations and Freedom" (ENF) since 2019. Now is named "Identity and Democracy (ID).

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# Reinventing the Radical Right? The Portuguese case after the 2019 elections

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## Introduction

The scientific literature about the extreme right<sup>1</sup> in Western democracies places Portugal among the countries where this phenomenon possesses a very low intensity (Backes 2011). In the European landscape, characterised by a general growth of the extreme right, new Southern Europe has been a region that traditionally lacked relevant extreme right parties. Yet, even these countries have recently seen the emergence and success of new forces belonging to this party family, mainly (but not only) as a consequence of the Great Recession, which has opened windows of opportunity for anti-system parties. In Greece, the old extreme right (Golden

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<sup>1</sup> According to Ignazi (2003), we need to distinguish between the 'old' extreme right, i.e. those parties associated to the fascist ideology, and the 'new' extreme right, which originated in the 1970s as a reaction to libertarian forces. On the other hand, Mudde (2000) distinguishes between extreme-right parties, which are characterised by their anti-system and anti-democratic character, and the radical right, which displays anti-system stances but accepting democratic rules. This scholar also elaborates the notion of populist radical right parties, whose main feature is the combination between the political distinction people versus elites and the cultural distinction "natives" versus "aliens" (Mudde 2007).

Dawn) has obtained remarkable results due to the increase in immigration and unemployment, the sharpening of nationalistic and xenophobic tendencies in public opinion and the disappearance of competition in the radical area in the context of the general collapse of the party system (Ellinas 2013, pp.556-559). In Spain, the Great Recession, Catalonia's quest for independence and the crisis of the *Partido Popular* were among the main drivers of the success of Vox, a new extreme right party that achieved parliamentary representation in the 2019 April general elections.

Contrary to this trend, the Portuguese case has remained immune to the breakthrough of extreme right forces. Their marginal position in the Portuguese party system has been explained mainly as a combination of different historical factors: the late presence of right-wing authoritarian regimes, the recent establishment of democratic systems and the resulting lack of trust of the electorate in what concerns the proposals of the nostalgics (Ignazi 2003, p.1; Norris 2005, pp.65-66). Moreover, these aspects are further exacerbated by the type of transition – a rupture by military coup d'état – which further hindered the reorganisation of the extreme right after the collapse of the authoritarian regime (Linz 1998, p.40).

However, things have changed with the 2019 legislative elections, which registered the election, for the first time ever in the Portuguese democratic history, of one MP (André Ventura) from a new populist radical right party, *Chega* (Enough). Among growing fragmentation and polarisation of the party system, this new party achieved visibility thanks to its leadership and its anti-establishment stances. The aim of this chapter is to briefly depict the trajectory of the extreme right in Portugal, in particular during the XXI century, and to provide a preliminary analysis of this new phenomenon, namely in terms of its origin, organisation and programmatic orientations.

This chapter is structured as follows. The next section describes the historical evolution of extreme right parties during the democratic regime. The third section analyses the electoral performance of the extreme right in Portugal, whereas the following section examines the emergence of the new radical right party *Chega*. The conclusions highlight the relevance of the extreme right in the Portuguese party system and the main implications for the political system.

## The dynamic of the extreme right, from the transitional period to the new millennium

From a chronological perspective, the III Portuguese Republic can be divided into four relevant historical periods to the extreme right. The first period begins with the 25<sup>th</sup> of April of 1974 and ends on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November of 1975 and represents the very early stage of the formation of extreme right parties and its disappearance due to the repression exercised by the revolutionary authorities (Costa Pinto 1998)<sup>2</sup>. The second period starts in the beginning of 1976 and culminates with the legislative elections of the 5<sup>th</sup> of October of 1980 that puts an end to the attempt of the extreme-right to enter the parliament. The third period includes the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is characterised by three factors: the abandonment of the party-building and electoral strategy, the groupuscularisation and the generational and ideological change in extremist activism. The fourth period comprises the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (1999-2020) and corresponds to the return of the extreme right to a party project and to electoral strategy. At the very end of this fourth period finally and for the first time in the Portuguese democracy, a populist radical right party has been able to elect one MP for the national parliament at the 2019 general elections. In this sense, we can now talk about a new period that has been opened for the Portuguese radical right.

After the repression (*Movimento Federalista Português/Partido do Progresso* and *Partido Liberal* in September 1974) and exclusion from the election (*Partido da Democracia Cristã* in April 1975) experienced during the democratic transition, the extreme right resumed a party-building and electoral strategy in the new phase of democratic consolidation. In the midst of the large development of organisations that characterised the Portuguese transitional period in all the political quadrants (Fernandes 2014, pp.10-14), the extreme right organised itself, between 1976 and 1980, in parties, political and social movements, cultural and editorial groups. From the perspective of the political parties, three main actors emerged: the *Partido da Democracia Cristã* (PDC), the *Movimento Independente para a Reconstrução Nacional* (MIRN) and the *Frente Nacional* (FN).

The party initiative is renewed at the end of the 1990s, thanks to the intersection of elements that had a Salazarist nationalist background, in particular António da Cruz Rodrigues, and of elements from small radical groups, specifically from the ethno-

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<sup>2</sup> In the Parliament the right has been represented by the CDS (Centro Democrático Social), which has governed - with the exception of the coalition with the Socialist Party in 1976 - with the centre-right party PSD (Partido Social Democrata).

nationalistic *Movimento de Acção Nacional* (MAN). These elements establish, in 1995, the *Aliança Nacional* (AN), supported by the *Nova Arrancada* editions and by the weekly *Agora!*, with the aim of reactivating some of the dying transitional parties, like the PDC. Differently from these, however, the AN is not able to gather the necessary signatures for the legalisation of a party, which exemplifies the diminishing organisational capacity at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The attempt to constitute a political party is only successful in 1999, when the signature stalemate is overcome thanks to an infiltration in a party which already existed: the *Partido Renovador Democrático* (PRD). The PRD, founded in 1985 in connection with the figure of the then Portuguese President of the Republic Ramalho Eanes, had obtained dazzling electoral success, but had also experienced a rapid decline (Jalali 2007). Reduced to the status of a phantom party, the PRD is easily controlled by the extreme right. In 2000, the PRD is reorganised: the name is changed to *Partido Nacional Renovador* (PNR), its symbol is changed to a bright red and blue flame and its presidency is bestowed upon António da Cruz Rodrigues. Right at its beginning, the PNR suffers a leadership crisis, due to the differences between the faction of the old Salazarist nationalism and the supporters of the new ethno-nationalistic extremism. The victory of the latter supporters, in 2002, leads Paulo Rodrigues, former member of MAN, to the presidency of the PNR, who was then substituted, in June of 2005, by José Pinto Coelho, nationalist militant since the end of the 1970s. Pinto Coelho's tenure opens a new phase in the life of the party, characterised by the attempt to introduce in Portugal some of the issues prioritised in the agenda of the 'new' European extreme right (Costa 2011).

From the perspective of historical roots, the PNR claims the contribution of the authoritarian regime to the defense of traditional values and the figure of Salazar as the biggest Portuguese statesman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The party puts forward a radical alternative to the current regime, based on the establishment of a IV Republic and on the development of a new Constitution, free from the Marxist traces from 1976. The defense of the Salazar regime and the fight for a new democratic system represent the attempt by the party of translating the classic nostalgic revanchism to populist positions more adequate to the contemporary political arena.

From the perspective of the international political agenda, the PNR has evolved from a hard-euroscptism to a soft-euroscpticism. While at its beginning it defended the exit from the European Community and from the single currency, the party has moved toward the support of a radical reform of the European Union. In particular, PNR is still against the strengthening of the integration process and admits the

reinforcement of economic ties between European states, but it rejects the federalist solutions that diminish national sovereignty. According to the party's stances, Portugal's membership in the EEC in 1986 is the cause of the current problems of the country, namely the crisis in the key sectors of national economy (agriculture, fishing, small and medium sized businesses) and immigration. The PNR recognises Europe as the natural cultural dimension of Portugal, but only as a synonym of the Catholic West. In this scope, it abandons the Euro-African tendencies of the old Portuguese nationalism, it demands that Portugal leaves NATO and it is against Turkey joining the European Union, in the context of a broader fight against the islamisation of the old continent. In what concerns immigration, the PNR presents an ethno-nationalistic discourse, in which the so-called 'invasion' is seen as a threat to the nation's cultural identity, employment, trade and public security (Zúquete 2007). For this reason, the PNR asks for the suspension of the Schengen agreement, the repatriation of illegal immigrants, the blocking of family reunification and is against, in the name of *ius sanguinis*, the principle of *ius soli* reinforced by the law on citizenship approved in 2006 by the socialist government. To the party, the defense of the national community entails the defense of the traditional family, core nucleus of society, threatened by the decriminalisation of abortion and the activism of the gay lobby.<sup>3</sup>

## The electoral performance of the extreme right in Portugal

If the historical dynamic of the extreme right allows for the evaluation of its organisational strategy, the electoral results allow us to quantify the acceptance of this proposal as an anti-system alternative and, therefore, to assess, in a comparative way, its evolution. In the literature there is still a huge debate about the factors that are more favourable to extreme right parties. One of these factors is related to the type and features (disproportionality, electoral threshold, the dimension of electoral circles, etc.) of the electoral system (Jackman & Volpert 1996, pp. 501-2; Carter 2002, p. 138; Golder 2003, p. 461).

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<sup>3</sup> The homophobic and xenophobic nature of the message of the PNR can be clearly seen in the campaigns that obtained more media coverage: from the 'march against crime' in 2005, the 'protest against the gay lobby' in 2006, the outdoor sign against immigration in the square Praça Marquês de Pombal in 2007, to the campaign 'A coisa está preta! Nacionalismo renovador torna-a clara' (The situation is bleak! The reformist nationalism enlightens it) in 2012, and to the more recent 'Contra a invasão islâmica a Portugal' (Against the Islamic invasion of Portugal) in 2015.

In Portugal, the electoral system is proportional with a D'Hondt formula. The high level of disproportionality, the low fragmentation of the party system and the very different proportions of the 22 electoral circles lead to a situation in which small parties, with percentages between 1.5% and 3% of votes, are only able to elect members of the Portuguese Parliament in the large circles of Lisbon and Porto (Freire 2004, p.57; Freire & Meirinho 2012, p.109). These obstacles can be counterbalanced by a factor that is generally favourable to extreme right parties: the increase of abstention, which in Portugal absorbs, in what concerns the right-wing, part of the intra-block volatility, and, which, from the 1980s onwards, has reached higher numbers than the Western European average (Freire & Magalhães 2002, p.47). This electoral system has remained substantially unchanged since 1987.

During the post-transition period the extreme right registered poor electoral scores, ranging from 0.54% of the votes to 1.2%, the electoral peak achieved in the mid-term elections of 1979 (see Table 1). The failure of the 1980 elections, when three extreme right parties (PDC, MIRN/PDP and FN) formed a coalition with the goal of electing members of the Portuguese Parliament paved the way for a period of irrelevance in the Portuguese political system.

Differently from the traditional fragmentation of Spanish radicalism (Alonso & Kaltwasser 2014, p.14), in Portugal, the PNR is the sole contender in the extreme right since the beginning of the new millennium. Around it, there are a handful of organisations that, as in the 1980s-90s, can be characterised by a weak militant consistency and mobilisation capacity. After the "crossing of the desert" experienced in the 1990s, the Portuguese extreme right returns to electoral combat only in 2002, with the PNR. Despite the leadership renewal in 2005 and the successive modernisation of its image and political discourse, electoral results throughout the first two decades of the 21st century do not show any remarkable developments. If in 2002, the meagre 0.09% of the vote could still be attributed to the early stages of the party, the following percentages (0.16% in 2005, 0.20% in 2009, 0.32% in 2011) do not seem to represent a substantial consolidation, despite the steady increase. The electoral peak was achieved in 2015, when the PNR got 0.5% and 27,269 votes, approximately more than ten thousand votes obtained in the previous elections. The exiguity of the electoral performance is confirmed by the results obtained in the European elections, with 0.25% of the votes in 2004, 0.37% in 2009, 0.46% in 2014 and 0.49% in the 2019 elections (see Table 2).

Table 1. Portuguese Extreme-right at the Legislative elections

	PDC		PNR		Chega	
	Votes	(%)	Votes	(%)	Votes	(%)
1976	29,874	0.54%	-	-	-	-
1979	72,514	1.21%	-	-	-	-
1980*	23,819	0.40%	-	-	-	-
1983	39,180	0.69%	-	-	-	-
1985	41,831	0.72%	-	-	-	-
1987	31,667	0.56%	-	-	-	-
1991	-	-	-	-	-	-
1995	-	-	-	-	-	-
1999	-	-	-	-	-	-
2002	-	-	4,712	0.09%	-	-
2005	-	-	9,374	0.16%	-	-
2009	-	-	11,503	0.20%	-	-
2011	-	-	17,548	0.31%	-	-
2015	-	-	27,269	0.50%	-	-
2019	-	-	17,126	0.33%	67,826	1.29%

\*PDC-MIRN/PDP-FN Coalition. Source: [www.cne.pt](http://www.cne.pt)

Table 2. Portuguese Extreme-right at the European elections\*

	PDC		PNR		Basta	
	Votes	(%)	Votes	(%)	Votes	(%)
1987	40,812	0.72%	-	-	-	-
1989	29,745	0.72%	-	-	-	-
1994	-	-	-	-	-	-
1999	-	-	-	-	-	-
2004	-	-	8,405	0.25%	-	-
2009	-	-	13,214	0.37%	-	-
2014	-	-	15,013	0.46%	-	-
2019	-	-	16,163	0.49%	49,496	1.49%

\*Portugal is an official member of the EEC since 1986. Source: [www.cne.pt](http://www.cne.pt)

Despite the proximity of the electoral percentages presented by the extreme right parties in the two periods, the comparison between the absolute numbers of votes obtained in the different elections reveals interesting data that allows for a further assessment of the development of the extreme right challenge in Portuguese democracy. The best result achieved until now by the PNR, in 2015 with 27,269 votes, is very close to the worst result obtained by PDC in the electoral defeat registered in 1980. This means that the best result achieved by the PNR corresponds to approximately 37% of the best result by PDC obtained in 1979 with 72,514 votes.

This comparison suggests that PNR was unable to conquer younger voters and abstainers in order to compensate for the disappearance of the traditional extreme right electoral basis of support. At a territorial level, the disaggregated analysis of the electoral data shows that the PNR is able to obtain similar results to the ones achieved by its counterparts of the transitional period in the two larger cities of Lisbon and Porto, with averages higher than 4,000 and 1,500 votes, respectively, and with a slight increase in Lisbon in 2015 (from 6,193 to 7,188). On the other hand, it does not achieve the same visibility in the third largest city, Coimbra, where, comparatively, it obtains 1/3 of the electorate faithful to the transitional extreme right. Another relevant element is the disappearance, in the performance of the PNR, of the electoral capital represented by the circle Rest of the World, which in the late 1970s guaranteed the extreme right between 2,000 and 4,000 votes, with percentages of 3% to 8% of the circle's electorate. The disappearance of these votes is due to the generational and political change of the individuals that emigrated and to the return to Portugal at the end of the transitional period of many that had abandoned the country after the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, in contrast with the new regime. In terms of electoral geography, it is not possible to find an area of the country particularly favourable to the extreme right throughout the forty years of democracy. If some districts situated in the coast and in the centre-north of the country (in particular Santarém and Aveiro) are among the most favourable to the extreme right both in the transitional period and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the PNR obtains its best results in districts situated in the south and in the interior (Faro and Castelo Branco), without a voting tradition in the extreme right.

## The newcomer far right party: *Chega* by André Ventura

In the summer of 2017, the electoral campaign for the October municipal elections suddenly warmed up with the controversial statements by the centre-right coalition (PSD-CDS-PPM) candidate at the Loures – a traditionally socialist and communist town – city council presidency. The 36-year-old candidate André Ventura is a TV football commentator, with a past in catholic seminary in his teens, a PhD in law at York University and academic career at the University of Lisbon. Coming from the rank and files of the PSD, the candidate characterised his campaign with harsh critics against ethnic minorities, in particular those of African descent involved in the micro-crime in the social housing neighbourhoods and the Gypsy charged of welfare-parasitism and resistance to integration. The statements, unusual for Portuguese mainstream politics, had repercussions in the right-wing political spectrum: CDS-PP leader Assunção Cristas withdrew the coalition in Loures, despite the opposition of local cadres who did not see much of a difference from the 'law and order' positions of the former CDS-PP leader Paulo Portas. PNR leader José Pinto Coelho, on the contrary, publicly greeted the social-democrat candidate, inviting him to join the nationalist party.

From that moment on, the media started to present André Ventura as the new far right spokesman in Portugal. For his part, the PSD candidate has always refused the label, calling the far right irrelevant in Portugal and the PNR opportunist for taking advantage of his campaign. The PNR, in turn, accused Ventura of having appropriated its political agenda and now outraged a party to which he expressed appreciation in private conversations on social networks.<sup>4</sup> Despite the controversy, at the Loures local elections Ventura won 21.55% of the votes and elected three city councilmen and got the best result ever of the PSD in Loures, with an increase of 4 percentage points in comparison to the 2013 elections.

Thanks to the prominence achieved in the media, André Ventura launched, between September and October 2018, the movement *Chega* (Enough), as a faction within the PSD aiming to call a special congress of the party to dismiss the president Rui Rio due to his centrist (moderate) orientations. The operation did not gather the support expected by the party main figures. In response, André Ventura resigned from his office as a councilman in Loures, left the party and launched the gathering of the 7,500 signatures necessary to register *Chega* as a new political party that,

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<sup>4</sup> "Temos causas e coragem, eles têm os meios e o oportunismo", disponível em <http://www.pnr.pt/2017/08/causas-coragem-os-meios-opportunismo/>

in the words of his promoter, 'will not be a right-wing in the American nor the Brazilian, nor the Italian style. It will be a right-wing to Portuguese fashion!'<sup>5</sup> The party formalisation in the Constitutional Court took place in the second half of January 2019. After a first rejection in March 2019 due to invalidation of a few hundred signatures of minors or citizens belonging to the security forces, the new party made a new request, which this time was successful. The registration by the Constitutional Court was finally approved on 9 April 2019.

In parallel to the party's legalisation process, André Ventura liaised contacts with smaller right-wing parties with the aim at forming a coalition for the European elections of 26 May 2019. In particular, *Chega* targeted the Christians of the *Partido Cidadania e Democracia Cristã* (PPV/CDC), the liberals of the *Democracia 21*<sup>6</sup> movement and the monarchists of the *Partido Popular Monárquico* (PPM). The aim at forming a coalition was due mostly to a practical reason, given that the new party was not legally constituted yet, and by law a coalition needs to include at least two parties officially recognised by the Constitutional Court. The agreement with PPV/CDC and Dem21 was easily reached in February 2019. More complex was the agreement with the PPM, whose National Council initially rejected any approach to *Chega*. The impasse was resolved only by the direct intervention of the party president (Nuno da Camara Pereira) who convinced the high ranks of the party to coalesce with *Chega* on 13 March 2019. The process of legalisation of the coalition in the Constitutional Court also suffered difficulties: in April 2019, the successive denominations *Coligação Chega* (Enough Coalition) and *Europa Chega* (Enough Europe) are rejected because they contain the name of one of the coalition parties, forcing it to choose the name of *Basta!* (a synonym of Enough!).

From the organisational point of view, this new party adopts a traditional hierarchical model, similar to the mass party type (the usual structure of Portuguese parties, see Lisi 2015) based on the National Convention as the main party body, elected by party branches ('*concelhias*', party's structures at the municipal level) and an executive body (*Chega* 2019). The National Convention also elects the President, who presides the works of the National Directorate. In practice, however, the president and leader, André Ventura, has clearly played a dominant role in the party elite, mainly because its huge media exposure – unprecedented for radical right

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<sup>5</sup> Octávio Lousada Oliveira, "Poderá haver um líder populista em Portugal?", *Visão*, 17/11/2018, <http://visao.sapo.pt/actualidade/portugal/2018-11-17-Podera-haver-um-lider-populista-em-Portugal->

<sup>6</sup> *Democracia 21* is a micro-movement from the right established in 2018 by a former PSD member. This force defended a liberal agenda in the socio-economic dimension and a progressive orientation in terms of values. However, it failed to gather signatures to form a new party.

forces in Portugal -, which has strengthened the identification between the party and its leader. The party has also an intermediate level organisation through district sections. Its territorial penetration has increased over time and it has now working structures in all Portuguese districts. The party accepts members (approximately 25,000 individuals as of May 2021, according to party headquarters) and is currently trying to establish a youth organisation.

In the aftermath of the European elections, *Chega* began the structuring process. On 30 June 2019, the founding National Convention is held in Lisbon, which confirmed André Ventura as party president – as at the following September 2020 and May 2021 National Conventions – and elected the other governing bodies. Among the main figures of the party is Diogo Pacheco de Amorim, the ideologue and author of the *Chega* program. His political trajectory is interesting to define *Chega*'s identity: veteran of the nationalist academic organisations at the end of the authoritarian regime, Diogo Pacheco de Amorim joined the Portuguese radical right – the Portuguese Federalist Movement (MFP / PP) and the clandestine Democratic Movement of Liberation of Portugal (MDLP) – during the democratic transition between 1974 and 1976. At the end of the 1970s, he became one of the young intellectuals of the right who tried to introduce the thesis of the French *Nouvelle Droite* in Portugal, combined with his liberal positions in economy and state organisation that would characterise his political orientations over the next decade. After a brief experience in General Kaúlza de Arriaga's far right party, MIRN, Pacheco de Amorim joined the CDS in the 1980s, becoming a party parliamentary advisor. In the 1990s, he is the right-hand man of the party's president Manuel Monteiro<sup>7</sup>, in his attempt to turn the CDS to the right, and with him, led the right-wing split from CDS: the New Democracy Party (PND, *Partido Nova Democracia*) which, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, tried without success to create a clearly right-wing, Eurosceptic and national-populist force in Portugal (Marchi 2018: 123).

Overall, the new populist radical right party is a result of the effort of a political entrepreneur, who was able to exploit key resources to get more visibility and to elaborate a new political offer in the context of the 2019 elections. Although its origin was linked to PSD dissidents, the new force has incorporated both nationalists and independents from the catholic, liberal and mainstream right-wing camps. Consequently, the party has a hybrid nature, which is still very fluid and whose developments are uncertain. The final result will depend not only on its

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<sup>7</sup> Manuel Monteiro acted as CDS leader between 1992 and 1998. During this period, he rebranded the party as PP (*Partido Popular*). Since 1998, when Paulo Portas assumed the party leadership, the party officially adopted the denomination of CDS-PP (*Centro Democrático Social-Partido Popular*).

growth, but mostly by the way the leader will control and manage the different groups that form the party.

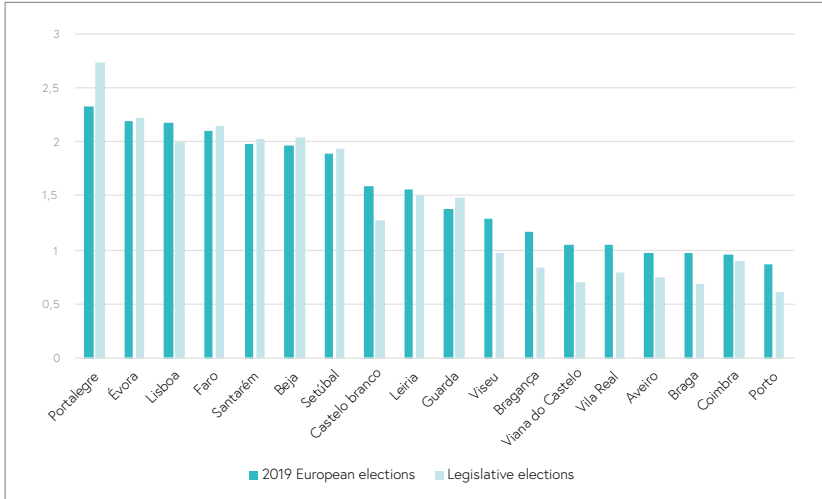
## The electoral performance of the extreme right in the 2019 elections

Seventeen parties/coalitions were allowed to run in the 2019 European elections, one more than in the previous contest. Three completely new parties were formed and were standing in elections for the first time. The first was Alliance (*Aliança*), a new rightist party formed by an ex-PSD leader (and former prime-minister), Pedro Santana Lopes. Besides neoliberal positions on the socioeconomic front, the party took a soft Eurosceptic line and defended traditional values in the cultural domain, thus trying to compete with the PSD to appeal to rightist and conservative voters. The second new party is the Liberal Initiative (*Iniciativa Liberal*), which combined a strong emphasis on liberal economic policies (lowering taxes) with an anti-establishment discourse. Finally, the third new player was the coalition PPM. PVC/CDC, whose main force (*Basta!*, literally 'Enough') adopted a clear populist discourse, targeting primarily the political elite and immigrants.

The 2019 EP elections confirmed two broad trends that have characterised the evolution of the Portuguese party system. The first is the increasing level of fragmentation through the emergence of new parties, especially on the right side of the ideological spectrum. Indeed, the 2019 European contest proved that second-order elections are a favourable ground for the breakthrough of minor parties (see Freire and Santana-Pereira 2015), with the election of one MEP belonging to the small party PAN (*Pessoas-Animais-Natureza*). Despite a relatively high media visibility, *Basta!*'s performance was not particularly remarkable, obtaining 1.49% of the votes (approximately 50,000 votes), which represented an increase of only 0.58 percentage points compared to the set of votes won by PPM and PPV/CDC in the 2014 European elections. The result is mainly attributed to the scarce one-month-old political project and the far-right label glued by the media, but it revealed a certain electoral appealing of André Ventura compared to the 16,163 votes (0.49%) won by the PNR with its twenty years-old presence in that political area. It is also worth highlighting that the result was rather well distributed territorially, ranging from 2.32% obtained in Portalegre to 0.85% in Oporto district (see Figure 1). Although the coalition failed to achieve its main objective – to elect one MEP –, the leadership was rather satisfied with the results, and interpreted the performance as

a good starting point for the October legislative elections, with the aim to attract new voters and abstentionists through the politicisation of new issues<sup>8</sup>.

**Figure 1. Territorial distribution of Chega's electoral basis (% votes)**



In the electoral campaign, André Ventura confirmed the main points of his political agenda: reduction of the number of national deputies from 230 to 100, the abolishment of the prime-minister office and the establishment of a presidential system, the introduction of the life sentence for homicides (currently in Portugal the maximum is 25 years in jail) and chemical castration for pedophiles. The coalition platform also harshly criticised establishment parties for not being able to solve the country's main problems, as well as their politicians for their involvement in corruption scandals. Paradoxically, André Ventura's positions on Europe do not fit in the populist radical right discourse. Unlike the PNR, *Chega* rejects anti-Europeanism, considers any chance of leaving the EU and the Euro to be catastrophic for Portugal and, on the contrary, wants greater integration into a non-federal European Union, but composed of member states of equal dignity without hegemonic powers.

The local elections for Madeira regional government – held 22 September 2019 – contributed to consolidating the new populist radical right party and to preparing the general elections of 6 October. In the elections of the autonomous region of

<sup>8</sup> See *Diário de Notícias*, 26 May 2019 (<https://www.dn.pt/lusa/europeias-resultado-da-muita-forca-para-as-legislativas-de-outubro---basta-10944656.html>)

Madeira, *Chega* unsuccessfully tried to reach an agreement with the *Juntos Pelo Povo* (JPP) party, which had obtained 10% of the votes in 2015. Running alone, *Chega* won only 619 votes (0.43%), but it was able again to score a higher result than the PNR, which obtained just 274 votes (0.19%), a substantial decrease in comparison to the 2015 performance.

Finally, in the legislative elections of 6 October, *Chega* presented autonomous lists in which some of the PPV/CDC candidates are included, while PPM decided to run alone and Dem21 drifted apart from André Ventura for disagreeing with his anti-abortionist positions. The election campaign focused on the most bombastic points of the party's 70 measures program. In terms of institutional reforms, *Chega* campaigned for the shift from the current semi-presidential system to pure presidentialism and for the reduction of MPs from 230 to 100. With respect to 'law and order' issues, the party supported the strengthening of means for the Police and the increasing fight against micro-crime in the metropolitan peripheries. In the area of justice, Ventura reiterated the chemical castration of pedophiles and the life sentence for homicides. On socio-economic issues, he backed the fight against corruption through the prohibition of politicians working for private corporations with which they have negotiated in the exercise of their public functions. *Chega* also advocated the reduction of the role of the State in the health system, education, transport and infrastructure and the end of subsidy policies for Gypsy communities. Yet welfare policies are not consensual within the party, given the different 'souls' (more or less liberal) that can be found at its roots. In terms of values, the party is against the so-called "gender ideology" in schools, in favour of the removal of abortion and sex change surgeries from the concept of public health.

With this widely publicised agenda by the media as a Portuguese example of radical right populism, the party marked the history of the radical right in Portuguese democracy: with 66,448 votes (1.3%) won, André Ventura was elected to the Portuguese parliament deputy. He was the first elected deputy ever connoted with the far-right label since 1974. Geographically, *Chega* achieved its best results in some areas of the Alentejo – region with low population density in southern Portugal and communist tradition – as in densely populated areas on the peripheries of Lisbon. The data is explained by the permeability of Ventura's speech in inland areas with strong presence of Roma communities or Asian immigration in agriculture and in the metropolitan area of the capital with strong presence of ethnic minorities associated with the perception of insecurity and micro-crime. However, the analysis of the data cannot affirm a transfer of votes to *Chega* from the historic communist-

green coalition (CDU – *Coligação Democrática Unitária*) or from the PNR.<sup>9</sup> Both the CDU and the PNR registered a noticeable decrease in votes – the latter losing 40% of its electorate in 2019 – but also the center-right parties PSD and CDS-PP registered losses of 700,000 votes compared to the 2011 elections, and this could eventually contribute to *Chega's* success.

Besides the centre-right crisis and the volatility of the PNR electorate (the party obtained 0.33% of the votes, corresponding to 17,126 votes) the window of opportunity seized by this new party was explored even further due to the visibility its leader had in conventional and new social media. The new party, as other recently created forces such as PAN, had a stake in new technological devices and online communication as shown by the high numbers of Facebook followers (more than 60,000 as of November 2019, whereas *Chega's* Youtube channel has more than 20,000 subscribers). But it was mostly through the television – the most used device of Portuguese voters for obtaining political information (Lisi 2019) – that André Ventura achieved more visibility, especially acting as football pundit in a private channel – CMTV –, currently the channel recording the highest share of viewers.

In the aftermath of the election, André Ventura stressed the character of the *Chega* as a right-wing party, liberal in economics and conservative in values, the true barrier against the emergence of the extreme-right in Portugal. This seems to confirm its close proximity to the Spaniards of the *Vox* and the Italians of the *Lega* and *Fratelli d'Italia*, as well as the French *Rassemblement National* of Marine Le Pen. *Chega* joined, in July 2020, the Identity and Democracy group at the European Parliament. Indeed, the party has become the privileged springboard for Portugal's entry into the European dynamic of the rise of radical right-wing populism.

## Conclusions

Since the establishment of the democratic regime, the extreme right in Portugal has faced huge challenges in order to make a breakthrough in the political system. In organisational terms, the Portuguese extreme right has grown weaker in what concerns activists, engaged intellectuals, white-collar workers with higher socio-professional characteristics and financial means. The resulting decrease in supporters and the incapacity to make the most of the growing absenteeism to regenerate the

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<sup>9</sup> Pedro Magalhães, "As legislativas à lupa (em 7 pontos, 8 mapas e 2 gráficos)", *Expresso*, 13/10/2019 <https://expresso.pt/legislativas-2019/2019-10-13-As-legislativas-a-lupa-em-7-pontos-8-mapas-e-2-graficos->

electoral capital represent two more indicators of the decline of the challenge of the extreme right to the regime of the 25<sup>th</sup> of April. Overall, the electoral weight of the extreme right has remained very low until 2019, and this was due not only to the lack of an appealing leadership, but also to the elaboration of an original policy platform that could mobilise the nationalist electorate or protest voters.

Things have partially changed with the rise of André Ventura's party. Not only its leadership embodied a new political discourse based on populist or anti-establishment rhetoric, as he successfully adopted a new communication strategy based on the politicisation of new issues. Contrary to other radical or extreme right leaders, Ventura has a very media-friendly way to communicate his political message and has been able to attract a lot of attention through an appealing approach for both journalists and citizens. Although its success was limited compared to the breakthrough of the extreme right in other Southern European countries, it is nonetheless quite remarkable if we look at Portuguese democratic history. The first months after his election as MPs show that the party benefited from the visibility achieved in the Parliament in terms of public opinion, doubling its popularity<sup>10</sup>. In addition, Chega's leader has attracted a great amount of attention for its polemical statements and actions, as shown by its support to police forces' demonstration held in November 2019<sup>11</sup> and the third position (11.9% of the votes) gained in the presidential election in January 2021.

Given the high levels of dissatisfaction with traditional parties and the high proportion of disaffected voters (see Teixeira et al. 2014), this new populist radical right party may pave the way for the beginning of a new era for the Portuguese far right, strengthening populist appeals and anti-immigration feelings. Two challenges are particularly important for the consolidation of this new force in the short-medium term. The first is the organisational penetration and its capacity to establish party branches in the Portuguese territory, mobilising both resources and staff. The second is to co-opt party cadres and to benefit from the realignment that is taking place on the right of the political space. From this viewpoint, it will be interesting to see the future composition of its membership and the internal equilibrium among distinct party factions, especially between the more moderate component (coming from the PSD) and the nationalist tendency. It remains to be seen how mainstream parties will react to this challenge and to what extent a contagion can take place especially among right-wing actors and politicians.

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<sup>10</sup> The poll was released on 21 November 2019 by *Jornal Económico* (<https://jornaleconomico.sapo.pt/noticias/chega-duplica-intencoes-de-voto-no-mes-seguinte-as-legislativas-516646>)

<sup>11</sup> See <https://sol.sapo.pt/artigo/677816/ventura-recebido-em-xtase-pelos-manifestantes> (Sol, 21 November 2019).

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**Second Part**

# The radical right in Spain

# Spain remains different Vox and the new Spanish extreme right's reconfiguration

**Anna López  
and Marc Borràs**

The rise in Western Europe of so-called "new extreme right" (Ignazi, 2003) or "populist radical right" (Mudde, 2007) political parties is indisputable and currently—it seems—unstoppable. In 2014, representatives of the European extreme right managed to win 15% of the European Parliament's seats. After the May 2019 elections this number went up to almost 21%, with 157 members of European Parliament (MEP) spread across a constellation comprised of 21 national political parties. Virtually all EU Members States have had extreme right parties positioning themselves "at the center of the European political scene" (Antón-Mellón & Hernández-Carr, 2016: 13), hence conditioning not only their national political agendas, but the whole of the EU's, especially regarding immigration and security. The growth experienced by these parties has multifactorial causes. However, what is most significant is the fact that, ever since the Second World War, a supply from the extreme right has been strongly rooted in the European political

landscape with a discourse that claims national exceptionalism in the face of the globalizing impetus, identity withdrawal, prioritization of natives over foreigners, and the rejection of cultural diversity.

Nevertheless, Spain seemed to be on the fringes of these tendencies, standing as one of the few exceptions—along with Portugal and Ireland—to the general rule. This was the case up until December 2, 2018, when the recently created party Vox got 395,978 votes (10.97% of the total votes cast) in the Andalusian regional elections, resulting in twelve seats at the regional Parliament after CIS's October 15 pre-election poll predicted they would obtain one seat (CIS, 2018). Vox stood for election with a remarkably nationalist and recentralizing manifesto that countered separatist attempts by the Catalan independentist movement, while also blending well with archetypal neoliberal tenets advocating for an extreme thinning of the State. Additionally, Vox's manifesto focused on criticisms against illegal immigration—now a commonplace for the European extreme right—, feminism and LGBTBI+ discourses, which they disqualify as "gender ideology" and have so far become the Spanish extremist party's nemesis.

In order to properly assess these electoral results, comparing them with those obtained by parties on the same ideological family across forty years of Spanish democratic general elections may seem appropriate. In fact, the closest to results to Vox's are those obtained in 1979 by the National Union (Unión Nacional), a political party that managed to bring together the plethora of small electoral options which the extreme right had dispersed into after the dictator's death in 1975. That election saw them obtaining 378,964 votes (2.11% of the total), which resulted in Blas Piñar winning a seat at the national Parliament. However, an important difference must be taken into account: the National Union obtained those votes in a general election, while Vox managed to exceed that figure in a regional one. On April 28, 2019, a mere five months later, the party continued its electoral progression, obtaining 2,677,173 votes at the state level (10.26% of the total votes cast), which further increased to 3,640,063 (15.09%) six months later, after general elections took place again on November 10, 2019. It should be noted that four years earlier, in the general elections of December 20, 2015, Vox barely managed to obtain 58,114 votes (0.23%), which were even further reduced in June 26, 2016 re-election (47,182 votes, 0.20%). In other words, in less than a year Vox went from being institutionally irrelevant to becoming the third parliamentary force in the country. Hence, we are facing a 15 percent meteoric—and astonishing—progression in a single four-year electoral cycle, which seems even more remarkable if we consider that the party was founded at the end of 2013.

That being said, until Vox's appearance everything seemed to indicate that, unlike its European counterparts, the Spanish extreme right was irretrievably condemned to institutional marginalization. Some specialists even wondered if Spain was simply no country for the type of extreme populist radical right (Alonso & Kaltwasser, 2014) that proliferated around European political environments. Only after 2019 the Spanish extreme right represented by Vox obtained results up to par with those obtained by the rest of its European counterparts: the Italian Northern League (17.2%), the Dutch PVV (13.1%) or Alternative for Germany (12.6%).

This new situation has forced specialists into quickly—and unexpectedly—changing their investigation's directions. Until 2019, the exceptional nature of a the Spanish political system that eternally condemned the extreme right as an "absent presence" (Casals, 2000) was what needed to be explained. Suddenly, the tables have turned and the key question has now become to explain the reason for the sudden electoral success of an extreme right party in Spanish democracy. Of course, asking this question is closely related to inquiring about the factors that—up to this date—prevented a radical right-wing party electoral triumph in Spain like those that were taking place in the rest of the EU. In short: what changed in the Spanish political framework that allowed for Vox's proposals to gain enough electoral echo for the party to forcefully break into Spanish representative institutions?

In order to answer both questions this article's first part analyzes the causes for the political and electoral marginality of the new Spanish extreme right up to the present, pausing for a short analysis of the political supply offered by two parties that for a while started to adopt a similar discourse to that of the European radical right: *Plataforma per Catalunya* and *España 2000*. In the second part, on the other hand, we will argue that the electoral success of Vox is explained—almost exclusively—by the activation of the center-periphery nationalist cleavage<sup>1</sup> caused by the unilateral call for a self-determination referendum by the Catalan pro-independence political forces that represented the majority of the regional Parliament and held the government of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*. The referendum was scheduled for October 1, 2017, however the independentist process—later known simply as "*Procés*"—began many years earlier, with the June 27, 2010 ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Court that declared numerous provisions of the new Catalan Statute of Autonomy unconstitutional, and most importantly, it denied any legal validity to the declaration of Catalonia being a nation that its Preamble included. The *Procés*

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<sup>1</sup> In doing so deactivating the socio-economic left-right cleavage, which was crucial in both the 2015 and 2016 general elections.

culminated with an (also) unilateral Declaration of Independence of Catalonia, approved by some parties of the Catalan Parliament on October 27, 2017, which caused the suspension of autonomy by virtue the Spanish Constitution's article 155.

However, Vox's electoral success cannot be explained by the actual referendum or the Declaration of Independence in and on themselves, but we must turn to how whole Catalan secessionist crisis was managed by the Popular Party's (PP) Government in office. It is of paramount importance to bear in mind that Vox's electoral rewards were not so much a consequence of *facts* but of the social *perception* of said facts and how they affected governmental actions. As Martínez Pastor (2019) states, "often we humans do not act according to reality, but according to how we perceive it", hence our analysis will focus to equal extents on subjective aspects as well as quantifiable data.

## Reasons behind the (long) journey across the desert

Very few studies have delved into the causes of the Spanish exception, characterized by a political system in the midst of which there seemed to be no place for extreme right-wing parties: neither the most traditionalist and undemocratic, nor those that made an effort to modernize manifestos and ideologies in order opt for better electoral results made it into the system. The reason behind the aforementioned lack of studies has been meager and insignificant electoral results obtained by the Spanish extremist parties throughout the 39-year period that goes from the 1979 elections (in which they won a seat in the Congress of the Deputies) until the end of 2018, the year that Vox broke into the Andalusian autonomous parliament with unusual force (12 seats). One of the few specialists who paid attention to the—then incipient—phenomenon of the new Spanish extreme right was political scientist Hernández-Carr (2011). After studying Plataforma per Catalunya's (PxC) electoral cycle Hernández-Carr argued that "Spanish immunity" to the extreme right was due to both endogenous and exogenous reasons. There was simply no other possible explanation behind the extreme right barely achieving institutional representation despite their electoral manifestos being very similar to those of their European counterparts.

Among the exogenous factors the special political relationship that democratic Spain has maintained with the rest of the European continent undoubtedly stands out. This factor has prevented one of the most archetypal ideological features of the

European extreme right, —i.e. Euroscepticism—from growing on Spanish political soil. Whether due to Spain's late entry onto the former European Common Market (1986), or because the massive arrival of European funds and financing allowed for an undeniable modernization of a country that had lagged culturally, politically and economically *vis-à-vis* its continental neighbors, the Spanish Eurosceptic sentiment has never been sufficiently strong so as to foster any ideological breeding ground or a state of public opinion (not even in the form of silence spiral) from which the Spanish extreme right parties could take Europhobic electoral revenue—just as the rest of its European coreligionists have done (López, 2019). Being a part of EU's political and economic structures has not been widely perceived by the Spanish electorate as an economic risk or a significant loss of national sovereignty. This is well illustrated by the result of the various referendums for the approval of the Treaty —signed in October 2004 in Rome— that established a Constitution for Europe: Spain was the first country to vote massively in favor (with almost 77% support), while that France and the Netherlands rejected it (54.68% and 61.5% respectively) (López, 2017).

Furthermore, Eurobarometers indicate that Spaniards are more pro-European than average: in 2008, only 6% of Spaniards had a negative perception of the EU, well below the EU average (14%). Regardless of the fact increase in anti-European sentiment across Europe caused by the economic crisis also affected Spain, negative attitudes towards the EU were still less widespread in Spain than elsewhere (23% in Spain compared to 27% on average for the EU in 2016). In the 2011 Eurobarometer, 75% of the polled Spaniards believed that belonging to the EU had been beneficial for Spain<sup>2</sup>.

Historian Xavier Casals, presented a different set reasons for the Spanish exception: the rather recent memory of Francoism in Spanish society, internal struggles within extreme right factions, and the absence of charismatic leaders, all prevented their unification into a viable project and also explain the lack of modernizing processes within these political organizations. According to Casals, once the transition to democracy was carried out, instead of looking to the future, the Spanish extreme right returned to the ideological principles they held prior to the Civil War: a firm opposition to all left-wing parties, a strong adherence to Catholic dogma (opposition

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<sup>2</sup> This explains why Vox's Euroscepticism is very nuanced and occupies peripheral positions in its discourse. At the October 7, 2018, Vistalegre rally, the party's first mass public presentation, Vox leader Santiago Abascal, simply asked "the European Union and all other international institutions, respect for our sovereignty, identity and laws". Vox's electoral manifesto claims the party will prioritize "Spain and Spaniards' needs before oligarchies', caciques', lobbies' or supranational organizations' interests", however it avoided naming the European Union and it diluted it in a broader set of apparent threats to national sovereignty (Ferreira, 2019).

to atheism, Marxism, and democratic secularism), and an unnegotiable defense of a Spain's unity and centralism—in open opposition to the peripheral nationalist aspirations that the autonomous state [*Estado de las autonomías*] recognized (Casals, 2011).

Certainly, the extreme right's political supply's endemic fragmentation made it difficult for a single and unifying national political project to consolidate (in 2008 up to nine parties stood in the different elections, which, where reduced to three/ four by 2012, were reduced to four). This exacerbated division was ultimately due to the existing different political loyalties within Spanish extreme right's various parties, small groups or civic organizations. Before Vox, only two of these parties (Plataforma per Catalunya and España 2000) tried shifting ideologically—on both symbolic and semantic levels—in order to set distance with from nostalgically fascist (Francoist) positions. However, this shift has not taken place within other political formations such as La Falange or the National Front (Frente Nacional), who not only claim the national-Catholic legacy but also continue to propose it as a political model for the future (López, 2017).

**Table 1. Extreme right political parties that stood for general elections 2004-2019**

2004	2008	2012	2015	2016	2019
Falange Española de las JONS (FE-JONS)	FE-JONS	FE-JONS	FE-JONS	FE-JONS	FE-JONS
Falange Auténtica (FA).	FA	PxC	DN	PxC	DN
La Falange	La Falange	MSR	Vox	La Falange	Vox
España 2000 (E2000)	E2000	E 2000		Vox	
Democracia Nacional (DN)	DN				
Alianza Nacional (AN)	Alternativa Española (AE).				
Movimiento Social Republicano (MSR)	AN				
Estado Nación Europa	Plataforma x Catalunya (PxC)				
	Círculos José Antonio				
	Frente Español				

Source: authors' elaboration using data from Ministerio del Interior (Spanish Home Office)

Authors like Rodríguez (2006), Pardos-Prado (2012) and González Enríquez (2017) have turned to the interaction of various factors—mainly related to institutional design—in attempting to explain this unusual state of Spanish political exceptionalism. Firstly, the deep-rooted Spanish bipartisan tradition, which ultimately refers to the nineteenth-century bipartisanism [*turnismo*] that dominated politics for 40 years (1876-1916), and seemed to be replicated in the parliamentary system of 1978, with PSOE and PP alternating in power. Secondly, these specialists also showed the Spanish electoral system as a factor worth considering, since it favors major parties and makes it extremely difficult for minority parties to obtain institutional representation (Martín Cubas, 2016). Finally, and most importantly, they noted the fact that the Spanish right's hegemonic party (the PP) acted as a catch-all party that brought together voters across the full conservative spectrum, leaving absolutely no breathing (electoral) air to parties ideologically located to its right (Alonso and Kaltwasser, 2014).

Another of the most characteristic ideological components of the new European extreme right is its anti-immigration discourse. Specialists seem to unanimously agree that anti-immigration discourse is one of the factors that best explains the rise of Extreme right parties, both at the national and European level (Pardos-Prado, 2000; Iversflaten and Gudbrandsen, 2014; Fangen and Vaage, 2018)—regardless of the fact that this was not the case in Spain (Morales, Pardos-Prado and Ros, 2015). Surely, Spain used to hold—and still does—noticeable differences with other European countries such as France or Germany. On the first hand, it started being a host country for immigrant population only in the very early years of the 21st century: in the year 2000 it had an immigration rate of 2.3% of the total population, reaching a significant 12,2% only ten years later, only to decrease 9.6% by 2019. Secondly, the presence of political refugees is not as high or massive as in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands or Germany, nor has it fostered significant conflict, as has happened for example in the French *banlieues* or the Greek or Italian refugee camps. In addition, Spain's percentage of immigrants population is geographically very unequally distributed: only three provinces (Madrid, Barcelona and Alicante) hold 44.81% of all immigrants registered in Spain.

It is also true that the percentage of citizens concerned about this issue in Spain is one of the lowest of all European countries: in Estonia 79% of those surveyed identified immigration as the most important problem in the EU; in the Czech Republic, Denmark and Germany it was 76% (European Commission, 2016: 17). Spanish national surveys show that immigration is not considered a major problem by the vast majority of society. This is shown, for example, by data from the

Sociological Research Center's (CIS)<sup>3</sup> Opinion Barometer for October–December 2017: a mere 3.2% of those surveyed mention immigration among Spain's top three problems. Only in 2019, after December 2018 Andalusian elections and the April 2019 general elections, did the percentage increase considerably to 15.6%—a figure that drops to 2.8% when the question becomes "Which is the problem that personally affects you the most?".

**Figure 1. Percentage of people who consider immigration one of Spain's three main problems**



Source: CIS Barometer

Regardless of the fact that the remarkable increase in the number of Spaniards who consider immigration to be an important problem could suggest Vox having managed to introduce the issue into the Spanish political imaginary, the latest studies indicate that the party's electoral success is not due mainly to a feeling of xenophobic rejection of immigrants, but to the (re)emergence of a Spanish nationalism threatened by Catalan secessionism. The *Procés* for independence would have thus turned Spanish "banal" nationalism—an omnipresent nationalism but of low intensity as it is backed by a state (Billig, 2014)—into a politically belligerent nationalism activated after feeling attacked and challenged by the Catalan independentist movement. Sebastian Rincken (2019) has suggested that, regardless of the fact that Vox's voters do tend to be more averse to immigration than other parties' voters, the far-right party's December 2018 Andalusian regional election results did not correlate with the existence of widespread feelings of rejection of immigration—with minor municipal exceptions such as that of El Ejido or Almería. This hypothesis has been supported by Turnbull-Dugarte (2019), who, by means of an empirical study—based on a multinomial logistic regression model—of

<sup>3</sup> The CIS barometers have been used given the lack of recent surveys specifically asking about attitudes towards immigration. The European Social Survey ninth wave results have not yet been published (the eighth wave dates back to 2016–2017), and the survey that is usually carried out annually by the CIS commissioned by the Spanish Observatory of Racism and Xenophobia could not be carried out in 2018. Therefore, in order to gauge the recent evolution of attitudes towards immigration in Spain, we have to resort to the CIS monthly Barometer.

individual determinants of voting for Vox in said regional elections, has found a "robust non-effect" between concerns about immigration and individual support for Vox, regardless of the "strong link between support for radical right parties and immigration observed across much of Western Europe".

## Plataforma per Catalunya: a slight exception

Despite the fact that everything seems to indicate that the anti-immigration cliché is not enough to electorally articulate a Spanish extremist option comparable to European ones, there are hints suggesting that a certain electoral demand that is sensitive to the most xenophobic postulates does exist. That was the case with Plataforma per Catalunya (PxC), which operated electorally in Catalan territory between 2003 and 2016, only to end up (dis)integrating into Vox. The party's origins date back to January 15, 2001, when Josep Anglada founded Plataforma Vigatana, a party that was born as a local initiative in the city of Vic demanding greater control over its local immigrant population—which was accused of being responsible for most of the problems associated with citizen insecurity. Just one year later, on April 5, 2002, the local project went regional with the birth of PxC, which gained moderate success in the 2003 municipal elections, obtaining a representative not only in Vic (7.5% of the votes) but also in other municipalities. These results obtained by an openly xenophobic proposal attracted media coverage—albeit critical—, which further contributed to consolidating the project, evidencing in passing that there was an electoral demand, no matter how scant, that paid attention to political proposals of the kind that were starting to triumph in the rest of Europe. This was confirmed in the 2010-2012 regional and municipal electoral cycle, in which PxC managed to capture an average of 70,000 votes, which were nevertheless not enough to obtain representation in the regional Parliament. These votes, however, did translate into 67 councilors won in different towns across Catalonia after the 2011 municipal elections.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> To better determine the political eccentricity of anti-immigration discourse in the Spanish political system and, on the other hand, the axial character of what Alonso and Kaltwasser (2014) called "a cleavage structure characterized by an entrenched conflict between peripheral and state nationalism", it is worth comparing PxC's results to those obtained by another party that was also born in Catalonia at the same time: Ciutadans/Ciudadanos (Cs). Cs was admittedly born in 2005 as a party aiming to counter Catalan nationalism. Initially adhering to constitutional patriotism as defined by Dolf Sternberger and later defended by Jürgen Habermas, with the start of the Catalan secessionist crisis and the expansion of the party at the state level, Cs later turned into a more combative enemy of Catalan nationalism through a bold Spanish nationalism. The first time Cs stood for the regional elections (2006) it obtained 89,840 votes, which translated into three seats at the Catalan Parliament. They stayed at three seats after 2010 and increased to nine in 2012, only to finally win the December 2017 Catalan regional elections, after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence and that Catalan autonomy was suspended after the application by the Spanish government of Article 155 of the Constitution. All of the above confirms that anti-Catalan Spanish nationalism [españolismo] yields more electoral benefits than anti-immigration discourse.

## España 2000: the prequel

As stated by Aitor Hernandez-Carr (2011) "PxC's political trajectory, especially during its first years of existence, must be understood as an attempt to distinguish itself from the stigmatized Spanish extreme right and to come closer to the successful European populist radical right parties". Its success was moderate—but sustained—until the effects of the 2007 Great Recession shook the Spanish political board with the appearance of new challenger parties (Podemos and a nationally expanded Ciudadanos) that threatened the hegemony traditionally hold by major parties' (PSOE and PP). The social effects of the economic crisis also caused the 2015 elections to be focus in a strictly socioeconomic cleavage opposing left and right parties. All of the above put an end to a marginal—but politically significant—party's trajectory: that of Plataforma per Catalunya, which in the municipal elections of 2015 went down from 67 to 8 councilors.

This socioeconomic reorientation of the 2015 electoral cleavage also negatively affected another party that had followed the modernizing trail set by Plataforma per Catalunya, although it achieved much poorer results: España 2000 (E2000), a party born in 2003 (and focused its political activity) in the Valencian Community, it defined itself from the very beginning as "social-patriotic" and "anti-immigrants". From 2007 to 2015, it became the main force in the far-right political space in the Valencian Community, managing to hold candidate lists in virtually all 542 municipalities in this autonomous community. The electoral results of 2011 (12,000 votes) doubled those of the 2007 elections, and quintupled those of 2003 and 2004, which earned E2000 some international notoriety, to the point that Norwegian supremacist terrorist Anders Breivick described the party as a "storm that shook Valencia" (Breivick, 2011: 263)—an exaggerated statement nonetheless.

España 2000's manifesto included what Ferreira describes as the ideological core of the European radical right: nativism and authoritarianism, "necessary and sufficient conditions for an organization to be labelled as radical right" (Ferreira, 2019: 82). España 2000's nationalism has always been explicitly exclusionary, demanding a strong control of immigration, which is considered the mother of all the evils that threaten the country. Immigration—specially muslim immigration—is seen as a threat to national identity, and is made responsible for crime, economic decline, and the cuts on social benefits that resulted from the economic crisis. A stricter Immigration Law and a non-negotiable defense of the *ius sanguinis* principle for obtaining Spanish nationality have always been part of its manifestos' proposals. Regarding the structure of the State, the party has always stood for strong

centralist principles, advocating the total abolition of the State of Autonomies and the outlawing of any form of separatism (López, 2017b).

Ultimately, these issues and political stances coincide with those held by Vox. Vox leader Santiago Abascal, stated at the parties' first mass rally—Vistalegre, October 2018— that "Spain wants our grandmothers to be able to calmly walk down the street without a criminal, whether he be Spanish or foreigner—although they are mostly foreigners—, pulling her bag". According to Abascal, Spain would also want "its home be defended [...], that the fences at Ceuta and Melilla be defended, that they be improved if necessary". Spain, said another speaker at the same rally, "is neither discussed nor questioned: it is to be defended and honored". Not for nothing, the second of "Vox's 100 measures to be taken to defend the Living Spain" (Vox, 2014) was the outlawing of those parties and organizations that "pursue the destruction of the nation's territorial unity and its sovereignty" (Ferreira, 2019).

Plataforma per Catalunya was officially dissolved on February 16, 2019, after unsuccessfully trying to form a national coalition with E2000 and Democracia Nacional before the 2016 general elections,<sup>5</sup> and finally announcing that it was joining Vox. España 2000, despite its insignificant electoral results<sup>6</sup>, continues to be active, though it focuses mainly on political agitation work closer Italian Casa Pound movement's praxis than to a far-right European party prepared to compete electorally with certain guarantees for success. However, if their principles (nativism, authoritarianism) were identical and the political strategies similar (modernization of leaders and discourse, use of social networks), why did Vox succeed where PxC and E2000 failed?

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<sup>5</sup> In those elections, held on June 26, 2016, just over two years before the December 2018 Andalusian regional elections, Vox managed to gather 47,182 votes (0.2%) and Falange Española y de las JONS 9,909 (0, 04%), while PxC obtained 724 votes and La Falange, a mere 254.

<sup>6</sup> Its greatest electoral success was obtained in the 2015 municipal elections, in which it obtained 7 councilors in different Spanish towns.

## Vox: from marginality to electoral success

Vox registered as a political party at the Spanish Ministerio de Interior (Home Office) on December 2013, presenting itself in its "founding manifesto" as a *regenerationist* political project "for the renewal and strengthening of Spanish democratic life and aiming to unite the Nation, to achieve State efficiency, to improve institutional quality, to guarantee policy makers' honesty and to promote economic growth in the benefit of all citizens" (Vox, 2014). Its presentation in society shortly after (January 16, 2014 ) attracted some media attention, particularly because it was attended by José Antonio Ortega Lara, a prison official that had been kidnapped for 532 days (between 1996 and 1997) by terrorist group ETA, and later released with great media coverage<sup>7</sup>. In 2003 Ortega Lara was part of the Partido Popular's (PP) candidate list for the city of Burgos' municipal elections. Years later he explicitly expressed his frontal rejection of the negotiating process that Rodríguez Zapatero's socialist government had initiated with ETA in order to achieve its dissolution. Ortega Lara was always a member of the PP's hardest line, and he finally left the party in 2008 due to ideological discrepancies, when the more moderate faction led by Mariano Rajoy prevailed against Esperanza Aguirre's, an *in pectore* candidate that was supposed to replace him after the PP's 2008 general elections defeat.

Ortega Lara's presence in Vox's first press conference helped everyone—the media and citizens—to instantly locate the party's *place* within the Spanish political spectrum, precisely at a time where the emergence of new parties that disputed traditional spaces and political prevalence<sup>8</sup>. Alejo Vidal-Quadras' election as the party's first president and candidate for the imminent European elections of 2014 further amplified the message that the party was trying to send to its potential voters: Vox was born, in practice, as a split from the PP, its "mother" party, from which it sought not only to attract former party members and positions, but also voters that were dissatisfied with the moderate ideological stance that seemed to have been imposed on the PP. After all, Ortega Lara and Vidal-Quadras were icons of the fight against terrorism and peripheral nationalisms such as the Catalan, which Quadras had contested in the years when Jordi Pujol was the autonomous community's president. Additionally, Vox's first actions hinted at the importance

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<sup>7</sup> In response to their rescue by the State security forces and bodies, the terrorist gang kidnapped and assassinated a few days later the PP councilor Miguel Ángel Blanco, which earned him the general animosity of Spanish society - which manifested itself en masse by demanding the release of the councilor— and was, in the end, the beginning of a long process of dissolution that ended on October 20, 2011 with the announcement of the definitive cessation of his armed activity.

<sup>8</sup> Podemos was born shortly after, on March 11, 2014, and Ciudadanos began its national expansion at that time as a state-level political project and not only limited to Catalonia.

that the new party placed on political communication, arguably equal or superior to that of ideological principles.

The fact that there was a certain—although inconsistent—electoral demand for such a new proposal is confirmed by the fact that in its first electoral appointment (the May 2014 European elections of May 2014, just five months after its birth), Vox almost managed to win a seat in the lower house at Strasbourg, obtaining 244,929 votes (1.57% of the total). Just 2,000 votes short of winning a seat (Ferreira, 2019). The following year the party obtained 22 councilors and 2 mayors in the municipal elections. On the December 2015 general elections, with 57,733 votes cast, Vox was also close to obtaining a representative at the national Parliament, but the numbers went down to 46,781 in the electoral repetition held in June 2016, which saw the PP concentrating center-right votes—negatively affecting not only Vox, but also Ciudadanos.

All of the above, proves that there was a certain social receptivity towards the ideas that Vox embodied. However, had it gained the political representation that it was close to achieving, it would have been a very minor one: one or two representatives at most. This would have nevertheless been a milestone for the traditional Spanish extreme right, and even for its most modern and up-to-date variations, such as Plataforma per Catalunya and España 2000, which never managed to get anywhere near the figures obtained by Vox in its first electoral performances. So: How and why, just four years later, Vox managed to break into the regional and national institutions with such unusual force?

Our hypothesis is that Vox took advantage of the "downwind" created by the political circumstances of the moment. During the period that goes from 2015 to 2018, these circumstances managed to completely turn around Spanish parties' political priorities. The scenario already showed signs of convulsion as a result of the great financial crisis unleashed in 2007. However, it was further disturbed by the secessionist crisis led by the Catalan independentist parties that held the government of the Generalitat, and that requested that referendum be held—not unlike the one held by the Scots in 2014—to determine Catalonia's relation with the Spanish state. Said referendum, although unsuccessful, gave international notoriety to the Catalan political situation, later amplified by the Unilateral Declaration of Independence—more symbolic than effective—, the suspension of autonomy, and

the imprisonment and trial of the main independentist leaders who had not yet gone into exile abroad<sup>9</sup>.

These events were experienced as an attack by a large part of the Spanish citizens. Traditionally this citizenry, had not previously manifested a great nationalist sentiment: Carmen González Enríquez stated in 2017 (just one year before Vox broke into the Andalusian parliament) that Spain's was "a weak national identity" that identified itself with its European status more than the average of European citizens<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, Spain had been one of the most affected countries by the crisis, which inevitably affected citizens' self-esteem and national identification: different European surveys assessing various pride and national identification indexes showed a significant reduction in the degree of identification with the country before and after the crisis: "in 2009, Spaniards rated themselves as 'very good' (7.8 out of 10), which turned into a 'pass' (5.5) in 2013" (González Enriquez, 2013). Let us add to all of the above, the fact that the Franco regime exploited some national symbols for its own benefit and to the detriment of others (in Spain there have always been other flags, other anthems and other possible State forms), or the support that peripheral nationalist movements enjoyed since the transition to democracy. Only then will we be able to understand why nationalism, one of the factors that helped forge the extremist vote in the rest of Europe, had so little predicament in Spain.

This changed with the 2017 Catalan secessionist crisis. Of course Vox was not born at that precise moment; three years had passed since its inception. However, it was certainly the main beneficiary of the newly (and reactively) installed Spanish nationalist "rearming" climate, for a large part of the collective imagination. A clear indication of the growing importance that the nationalist component in its ideology

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<sup>9</sup> In this turbulent political scenario, another unusual event in Spanish democracy must be mentioned, a fact that considerably weakened the PP: the success of a no confidence vote against Mariano Rajoy's government, on June 1, 2018. The event that detonated was the so-called "Gürtel case" sentence by the Audiencia Nacional [National Court], which declared the PP as a "lucrative participant" in a corruption scheme, and in which the court questioned prime minister Mariano Rajoy's statement's credibility as a witness. The sentence credited the PP's connection with a corruption plot at a time of social and economic crisis showing particular sensitivity towards political venality. It should also be noted that the no confidence vote presented by the PSOE prospered due to it being supported by Podemos, nationalist parties (PNV), and even Catalan (Junts per Catalunya and ERC) and Basque (EH) independentist parties. For the Spanish conservative milieu, this alliance between socialists, "communists", independentists and even "terrorists" was hard to swallow, especially since it took place right after the 2017 Catalan independence challenge to the State. Probably all of the above considerably activated a conservative vote that, moving away from a PP that was too closely associated to corruption, opted for other conservative options such as Ciudadanos and Vox. These parties grew at the PP's expense of the PP, as was proven in the April and November 2019 general elections, in which Vox engulfed Ciudadanos' votes.

<sup>10</sup> "Data from Eurobarometer No. 84 (2015) indicate that Spaniards are below the EU average in terms of feelings of 'attachment' towards their fellow citizens (four points below), while they clearly exceed the average in relation to their attachment to the EU (seven points above)" (González Enriquez, 2017).

played for Vox can be seen when comparing its founding manifesto (2014) with the "100 measures for the Living Spain"—presented four years later, in October 2018, on the eve of the Andalusian regional elections (Vox, 2018). While it is true that the foundational manifesto's first point states that Vox has—among other objectives—that of "uniting the Nation"; and that in its fourth point it appeals "to all Spaniards who want a united Spain", however, these stand as are very generic references, somewhat vague. No other specific nationalism—whether Basque or Catalan—is pointed out, nor are gross disqualifications used. Later into the manifesto, however—when the party's *raison d'être* is specified— there is a call to reform a "a political system that leaves the government at the mercy of forces whose explicit purpose is to obliterate national unity", and advocates for putting an end to the State of Autonomies due to its centrifugal potential and its cost: "our autonomous state is politically unmanageable and financially unsustainable", says the manifesto. This first manifesto called for a "strong and efficient State", but one that at the same time is "capable of recognizing our Nation's historical and cultural plurality".

Most importantly, however, is the fact that this was actually the party's second *raison d'être*, the first one being its will to lead a "vigorous reaction" to a large part of the population's "trust bankruptcy towards their representatives" due to the "serious cases of corruption [that] have plunged Spanish society into discouragement and has aroused its indignation" (Vox, 2014). In combating this serious state of prostration, Vox criticized those who tried to tackle the problem through a "purely economic approach" and advocated, instead, for "strong values", "moral conceptions" and "solid principles". This is in line with the cleavage that dominated the Spanish political scene, at a time in which the economic crisis already had severe consequences on the whole country's households' economies. This cleavage opposed left and right options in their different proposals for economic and social policies facing the crisis.

This changed dramatically in the "100 measures for the Living Spain" that Vox presented in October 2018. In the first section—significantly titled "Spain, unity and sovereignty"—Vox unambiguously proposed the "suspension of Catalan autonomy until 'coupism' is unmitigatedly defeated and civil and criminal responsibilities attributed", additionally proposing the "outlawing of parties, associations or NGOs that pursue the destruction of the Nation's territorial unity and its sovereignty". The text then proposes a series of measures in order to legally shield "the nation's symbols", protect Spanish language, put an end to the autonomous state, repeal Historical Memory Law and even to "increase the intensity and determination of diplomatic actions aiming towards Gibraltar being returned" (Vox, 2018). Thus, a

more daring 'Spanishism', without concessions or circumlocutions of any kind, which maintains an uninhibited familiarity with Francoist nationalism's myths and clichés: a unitary state (measures 5, 6, 10, 11, 36, 64); vindication of "Spain's contribution to civilization and universal history" (8); special cooperation with the "Hispanic historical community" (100); a new democratic authoritarianism that advocates increasing "punitive strictness" regarding certain crimes (16, 30, 31, 86, 87, 88, 90, 91, 92, 94) —among them "offenses and outrages against Spain and its symbols and emblems" (3)—; and a strict defense of Spain's supposedly more idiosyncratic traditions, such as hunting and bullfighting (67, 68) or the cultural promotion "of land-boundness, folkloric and traditional manifestations of Spain and its peoples within the scope of Hispanidad" (66). Once Vox obtained 12 seats at the Andalusian Parliament, and with the PP's candidate for president of the Junta de Andalucía needing them in order to access the government, one of the party's 19 proposals (or, rather, requirements) in order to support the candidate advocated for Andalucía's Day to be changed "from February 28 to January 2, in commemoration of the culmination of the Reconquest [Reconquista]" (Vox, 2019).

In order to back our thesis with greater empirical rigor, we have measured three variables related to electoral demand in percentual terms for the 2012-2019 cycle. These variables, according to the consensus shown by the specialized literature (Mudde, 2007; Arzheimer, 2009; Pardos-Prado, 2012) best explain the growth of the radical European populist right: nationalism, political disaffection and rejection towards immigration<sup>11</sup>. This analysis' main aim is to examine the evolution of these three variables in order to determine which factor (or factors) could have possibly influenced Vox electoral growth the most. The CIS barometer surveys will allow us to compare responses to the same questions in an extensive period of time and for a similar number of respondents. The value for Spanish nationalism has been obtained by operationalizing a combination of two questions (preference for territorial organization and Spanish sentiment), whereas rejection towards immigration and political disaffection have been measured by using the answers obtained from respondents when asked to list Spain's three most important problems.

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<sup>11</sup> These are three ideological components that also appear insistently in Vox's ideology. We have already discussed nationalism and political disaffection—the party's number one *raison d'être* according to its founding manifesto. Immigration is dealt with in their «100 measures for the Living Spain» text's third section, with 9 measures ranging from the criminal escalation to the closing of borders, deportations of illegal or legal immigrants who have committed crimes, and even stricter requirements for immigrants to regularize or naturalize (Vox, 2018). The fifth of the 19 proposals that Vox presented along with their backing of the PP's candidate for President of the Junta de Andalucía also included measures against illegal immigration: identifying and expelling illegal immigrants, eliminating subsidies, outlawing cooperating organizations and even fighting against "health services tourism" (Vox, 2019).

Table 2a. Main demand factors operationalised as survey questions

Variable	CIS's questions and answers
Spanish ultranationalism	<p>I will now show you some alternative formulas regarding Spain's state organization. Please, tell me which one is your preferred one.</p> <p><i>A state with a single central government without autonomies [comunidades autónomas]</i></p> <p>Which of the following phrases would you say best expresses your feelings?</p> <p><i>I feel just Spanish</i></p>
Rejection towards immigration	<p>In your opinion what is currently Spain's main problem? And the second one? And the third one? (Answer obtained from the total percentage column)</p> <p><i>Immigration</i></p>
Political disaffection	<p>In your opinion what is currently Spain's main problem? And the second one? And the third one? (Answer obtained from the total percentage column)</p> <p><i>Politicians in general, political parties and politics. The government and specific political parties or politicians</i></p>

Table 2b. Electoral demand factors causing the new extreme right's growth in Spain

	Votes for extreme right	Anti-immigration	Spanish ultranationalism	Political disaffection	TOTAL
2011	18,495	7.6	10.3	6.2	24.1
2015	67,313	3.9	39.1	16.9	59.9
2016	67,313	3.1	34.6	25.1	62.8
2017	58,069	3.2	39.4	32.4	75
2018	395,975	9.7	42.3	31.5	83.5
Jan 2019	395,975	11.1	29.9	34.2	75.2
May 2019	2,664,325	11	30.1	31.2	72.3
Jun 2019	2,664,325	11.3	30.4	35.5	77.2

Source: Self elaboration from CIS opinion barometer

The results would seem to confirm the existence of an electoral demand in Spain that is sufficiently important, and especially sensitive to political proposals located within the new extreme right's spectrum (national identity, political disaffection and anti-immigration sentiment)—as is the case in the rest of Europe. However, the Spanish case shows enough empirical evidence for us to conclude that the identity factor has had a greater impact, in the specific context of territorial tension between the state and an autonomous community (Catalonia). The CIS confirms that long before the 2011 Catalan secessionist crisis, the variable hereinafter referred to as Spanish ultra-nationalism<sup>12</sup> accounted for a 10.3 %, while in 2017 and 2018 it reached or exceeded 40%, and was later mitigated again.

Thus it seems obvious that the political situation benefited Vox electorally, since—especially since 2018—the party presented itself as being a firm and implacable defender Spain's, and particularly intransigent with the Catalan independence leaders and Catalonia's perks in several issues (education, the media, justice, etc.). In fact, the CIS post-election polls (May 2019, study 3248) clearly confirm that the Catalan secessionist crisis contributed decisively to Vox obtaining a result well above the demographic expectations: 59.5% of its declared voters claimed that the secessionist crisis *conditioned* their vote, but a quarter of them assured that it was *decisive* in finally deciding their vote. These figures are much higher than those shown for the rest of the right-wing parties' voters (44.6% Ciudadanos; 27.6% PP).

When asked about their preferences regarding the state's territorial organization the majority of Vox voters opted for a single Government without autonomous communities, compared to a scant 15% who shown a preference for current autonomous communities system. The majority of Vox voters are also mostly in favor of recentralizing powers (77% obtained from the sum of those who opted for a state in which the autonomous communities have fewer powers, and those that chose a state with a single central government without autonomies). 27.1% also recognized that they felt just Spanish, compared to 25.1% of the PP's voters.

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<sup>12</sup> We define Spanish ultra-nationalism as one that combines, not a local or regional, but an exclusively Spanish identity sentiment with a preference for a centralized territorial organization for the state—thus putting an end to devolution towards autonomous communities. There are, however, other non-"ultra" Spanish nationalism variations that are in favor of autonomous communities, and the state's giving them recognition for their characteristic identities, respecting and even fostering them.

**Table 3. Question 21. Have the recent events in Catalonia had any influence on your voting decisions in the April 28 elections?**

Vote as remembered in 2019 general elections						
	TOTAL	PSOE	PP	Ciudadanos	Unidas Podemos	VOX
Yes	24	13.9	<b>27.6</b>	<b>44.6</b>	12.9	<b>59.5</b>
No	74.8	85.3	71.9	54.9	86.4	40.5
DK	0.9	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.3	-
DA	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	-

Source: self elaboration using data from Estudio N° 3248. CIS Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), questions 21/21\*.

Although it does not seem to have been a crucial mobilizing factor in Vox's votes, it should be noted that immigration was gradually perceived as an important problem by a growing part of the Spanish population: from 2017 to 2018 the percentage of those who indicated as one of the most problematic issues quadrupled. From all of the above it may be inferred that xenophobic attitudes *also* contributed to the increase in votes experienced by Vox in the 2018 and 2019 elections. In fact, in the 2018 Andalusian elections Vox obtained remarkable results in areas with predominant intensive agriculture (such as El Ejido), which have been known for years for experiencing a deterioration of relations between indigenous and non-indigenous population. This would seem to confirm the widespread *parti pris*—at least in European radical right studies—that correlates xenophobic attitudes against immigration with the appearance and rise of new extreme right-wing parties. As we already verified in *Plataforma per Catalunya's* case, there was a certain electoral receptivity towards anti-immigration political proposals.

On the other hand, it is evident that political disaffection and citizen dissatisfaction with their political representatives grew exponentially since the economic crisis, especially since 2011, which resulted in the appearance of new parties that disputed the major or traditional parties' votes (PSOE, PP, IU). This was substantiated in the 2015 and 2016 general elections, when Vox presented an equally "regenerationist" manifesto that, unlike those of Podemos and Ciudadanos—which focused on a "purely economy-oriented approach"—was based on strong values, moral conceptions and solid principles (Lorente Fontaneda and Sánchez-Vitores, 2018). However, Vox's results in those elections, although highly significant for Spanish extreme right's standards, were insufficient. Only after reorienting its electoral

target in favor of a particularly belligerent ultra-Spanishism against the Catalan independence movement—hence leaving behind its initial regenerationist *raison d'être* against corruption—did Vox manage to break all forecasts, becoming the third parliamentary at the national level in the November 2019 elections.

Therefore, our study allows to conclude to a reasonable extent, that it was Vox's ultranationalist response to the Catalan secessionist crisis that electorally springboarded it in the first elections that took place after the political events of 2017: the December 2 2018 Andalusian regional elections. Other authors had intuitively arrived at the same conclusion: "spurred by the secessionist crisis in Catalonia, the new party was gaining momentum and surprised everyone by obtaining more than 10% of the votes and up to twelve seats at the Andalusian Parliament" (Ferreira, 2019: 77). These conclusions therefore reinforce what other studies that have pointed out: the scant explanatory weight of other factors—other than exacerbated nationalism—in the the new Spanish extreme right's exponential increase in votes (Rinken, 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Ortiz Barquero, 2019). This factors, on the other hand, do contribute more significantly to explain radical vote in other countries within the European environment.

## Concluding remarks: Spain remains different.

It could be said that Vox gained electoral momentum by taking advantage of the political juncture. Symbolic as they would have been— testimonial, almost laughable, since they would not have gone beyond one or two seats—, it is true that in 2014 and 2015 the party almost achieved historic results for an extrem right electoral option. However, Vox successfully surfed the political juncture waves: on the eve of the Andalusian elections, it hardened the Spanish nationalism—and anti-Catalan—component of its speech and the slipstream lasted until the April 28, 2019 legislative elections. When the elections were repeated on November 10 of the same year, Vox also benefited from the violent riots in Catalonia caused by the Supreme Court's October 13 sentence against the Catalan independence leaders who had initiated the secessionist "Procés". Those riots resparked a Spanish sentiment that had otherwise showed previous signs of decay, allowing Santiago Abascal's party to wrest the status of third parliamentary force off of Ciudadanos, who succumbed in the storytelling (and leadership) battle for the ultra-nationalist Spanish segment—just as what had happened to the PP in the April 28 elections. In just under a year, Vox not only managed to win voters from the Popular Party and

Citizens<sup>13</sup>, but it also managed to consolidate and augment them, since they were seen as a "useful vote" option, which historically was never the case for Spanish extreme right voters, who kept voting for the PP in order for their vote to be useful.

However, the fact that a reactive Spanish ultra-nationalism—against the Catalan secessionist project—helped Vox's exponential electoral growth, its other ideological traits must not be overlooked. We must remember that a political party is a living organism and, above all, it is adaptable to its environment's particularities. It happened with the French National Front after the 2007 economic crisis and their change of leadership. Since Marine Le Pen became its leader the party stopped turning towards nostalgia for the past, traditional identity discourse and anti-immigration issues, and focused on economic diagnosis, projection towards the future and on republican discourse (Alduy, 2015: 263). Vox case could be seen as similar, although in a reverse order: it went from prioritizing its strategy to overcome the economic crisis and the miasma of corruption—very consistent with the 2015 political juncture—to prioritizing a traditionalist identity—likewise in line with the Spanish 2018 political environment.

Far from being a minor question, the fact that Vox's success is due almost exclusively to just one aspect of the three that the literature says allowed far-right political options to take root on European soil since 1980—nationalism, anti-immigration, political disaffection—makes the party led by Santiago Abascal an almost unique case in Europe. So much so that Ortiz Barquero goes so far as to assure that "Vox represents perhaps a new type of radical right within the family of extreme right that is qualitatively and quantitatively different from the third wave of extremism in Europe (from the 80s to the 2000s). This fourth wave is ideologically more flexible and has a more diverse electorate [...]. A radical right that is ultimately an agent [...] that can strategically guide and emphasize certain issues, even beyond the issue of immigration"(Ortiz Barquero, 2019)<sup>14</sup>. Turnbull-Dugarte's thesis is very similar, however he expresses it in a more graphic and concise manner: despite the fact that the success of an extreme right-wing formation like Vox allows us to consider that Spain has finally adjusted to the political canons in force in the rest of the continent for many years, "Spain remains different" (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019: 3)

However, although Vox has grown in the midst of the Spanish identity crisis caused by the Catalan secessionist project, it has not refused to grow at the

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<sup>13</sup> 48.4% and 21.2% of the votes that ended up in Vox in the 2018 regional elections came, respectively, from the PP and Citizens (cf. Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019: 3. Figure 1)

<sup>14</sup> Own translation

expense of other conjunctural situations—such as the health crisis unleashed by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic—nor has it set aside its anti-immigration or morally regenerationist outbursts. This has been carried out by making use of rhetorical devices that occupy a prominent place in the party's political performance, and not so much by invoking its ideological basis. Content is seen as equally—or even more—important than form for Vox. Rhetorical inflation and the use of hyperbolic language or grandiloquent statements, are common in other European similar parties: "their rhetoric is always extreme: the adjective is always superlative—everything is 'dramatic', 'unbearable', 'catastrophic', 'wicked'. [...] The reign of the absolute—all or nothing at all—is pervasive: solutions will be 'urgent and radical', 'incontestable' [...]. Hyperbole is, actually, the reflection of a reality underestimated by other political forces [...]. Reality is this hyperbolic, and not discourse" said Cécile Alduy, referring to the French National Front (Alduy, 2015)<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, the qualifiers used by Vox are also always loud, thick, bombastic: thus, Spanish democracy's first coalition government between PSOE and Podemos would be, according to Vox, "illegitimate" because it carried out pacts with "traitors" to the homeland, separatists and Communists with a hidden agenda that seek to "destroy" the nation and install communism. In addition, these statements are always taken as irrefutable truths, since Vox is an exemplary 'post-truthful' party, which tries to establish and propagate a worldview which it refuses to renounce to, even after serious evidence against it is presented: "once adopted, the positions will be rigidly maintained, oblivious to any objection that may arise" (Sim, 2019)<sup>16</sup>.

Therefore, according to our analysis, it seems evident that this reign of the absolute—or all or nothing at all; Catalonia or Spain—has not only benefited Vox electorally, but has also placed it in a privileged position to influence the Spanish political system, at least in the immediate future. It also seems evident that Vox intends to continue with this same dialectic of the absolute—without possible 'aufhebung'—in its parliamentary execution. Only time will tell if this will provide the party the same or greater electoral results than those already obtained, particularly in a political horizon in which the Catalan independence challenge seems to have been diluted in the face of the pressing attention that other peremptory political issues always demand. As Ortiz Barquero says, the Spanish radical right's consolidation will depend to a great extent on that.

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<sup>15</sup> *Own translation*

<sup>16</sup> *Own translation*

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# Vox and the radical right's emergence in Spain

**Astrid Barrio**

## Introduction

The December 2018 Andalusian regional elections came as a major surprise that put an end to the so-called Spanish exception. For the first time, a radical right-wing party obtained representation in the regional arena, and did so with potential chances of joining the government. Vox went from a minimal presence circumscribed to the municipal political sphere to being a party opting for the government of an Autonomous Community. Since then, their electoral expectations for the general elections of April 28 and the regional, municipal and European elections of May 26 soared. Once the electoral cycle ended after the November 10 general elections repetition, Vox was present in all political arenas: it was essential for governance in some cities—among which Madrid stands out—, and in some Autonomous Communities—such as Andalusia, Murcia or Madrid—; and it was the third force in the national Parliament.

For more than a decade, both of the conditions that are considered to ease the way for the surge of populism were being met in Spain: an economic crisis and a political crisis. This circumstance made the emergence of populist formations of different kinds foreseeable, as was happening in other neighboring countries that were experiencing similar situations. However Vox, which was founded in 2014, remained an extra-parliamentary party while the economic crisis and traditional parties' discredit opened a window of opportunity for the emergence of new formations such as Podemos and Ciudadanos, which surpassed the representation threshold and gained relevance in the 2014-2016 electoral cycle—though none of them can be strictly considered a populist party (Barrio 2017).

What changed since then that could explain Vox's sudden surge? This paper will claim that the main explanatory factor for this party's growth has been the autumn 2017 Catalan crisis. The perception of a secessionist threat has fueled competition on the national axis among a PP, that was very weakened since the May 2018 no-confidence vote that made it leave office, and a highly reinforced Ciudadanos. This competition ended up playing in Vox's favor, being as it is Spain's party with the most extreme positions regarding national issues—not for nothing it is the only political party nation-wide that openly advocates for the suspension of Autonomous Communities and for the return to a centralized State model. These results are consistent with Rabushka and Shepsle's (1972) ethnic competition model predictions.

## And suddenly, Vox's arrival

### **Why hasn't the Spanish radical right been institutionally present to date?**

Present in Western European party systems' alterations since the early eighties, the radical right-wing family—characterized by a nationalist, nativist, anti-immigration and anti-globalization discourse and by its opposition to multiculturalism and European integration (Mudde, 2007)—had barely taken root in Spain, despite political dissatisfaction and matching attitudes towards immigration to present in European countries where it had been established.

The radical right party with the greatest institutional presence had been Plataforma per Catalunya (PxC)—a party that met all criteria to be included in that ideological

family. Whereas the party was present in Catalan municipalities with higher concentration of foreign population, it never achieved representation either in the Catalan or the Spanish Parliament (Casals, 2011). The same could be said of the traditional extreme right with links to the Franco regime. Only Fuerza Nueva in 1979 won a seat in the Spanish Parliament. Ever since the radical right political family has been extra-parliamentary at all government levels. Its inability to generate an attractive discourse; its nostalgia for the Falangist past; its flirting with violence; its high degree of internal factionalism, and the absence of leadership, along with the overwhelming preference of Spanish voters for moderate political options, explain why the Spanish classical extreme right had never been relevant ever since the reestablishment of democracy.

Despite a certain electoral potential being present, radical right parties' failures in Spain had been attributed by Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser (2015) to difficulties posed by political offer articulation. Firstly, due an electoral system characterized by do not favoring new small party entries—or so was generally thought until 2015. Secondly, because Spain's cleavage structure comprised of two main cleavages—the left-right and the center-periphery—is well established and hinders the emergence of new conflicts—especially those with an exclusivist or nativist component. Hence, the few parties that have tried to mobilize migratory or religious issues have had very little success beyond the local arena—and usually responding to specific problems, as was the case with PxC. And finally, because center-right's main party, the Popular Party, had displayed a competition strategy that allowed it to occupy the entire ideological spectrum ranging from center-right to extreme-right.

However, Esteban and Martin (2017) have questioned both institutional and structural explanations. They consider that although the electoral system's characteristics have traditionally not favored the entry of new parties, Ciudadanos' and Podemos' irruption has cast the shadow of doubt over that explanation. They also argue that in other countries where the center-periphery cleavage is also present—such as Italy, Belgium or the United Kingdom—right-wing populist parties have been able to surpass the representation threshold, and have benefited from connecting the immigration issue and the center-periphery conflict, which emphasize similar material and identity concerns, as has also happened in Spain.

Thus, the main reason behind the absence of a radical right party in Spain would be the presence of the PP, since this party would have mobilized potential radical right voters. Esteban and Martin conclude that in some respects PP voters were not different from those of radical right parties in Europe, particularly with regard to the

assessments of immigrant origin population's culture and religion and their role as possible competitors in the labor market. They differed, however, in that they were more politically confident since they supported the ruling party; in that they were less critical of immigrants of Hispanic origin and belonging to the same cultural matrix; in that they were more pro-European; and in that they were more in favor of law and order. Among the heterogeneous PP voter base, there would therefore be a hidden radical right voter comparable to those voting for the European radical right parties. This would have been made possible due to the PP being a highly institutionalized party, with a high reification level allowing it to attract both radical right-wing voters and moderate voters, this fulfilling a relevant systemic function as a containment dam for the radical right.

### **Institutional presence: Why now?**

As has already been pointed out, the electoral cycle starting in 2014, saw new parties such as Podemos and Ciudadanos achieving institutional representation, in both cases with potential to join coalition governments at different political levels. The increase in party fragmentation gave rise to a more plural, more open and more polarized party system (Rodríguez-Teruel et al. 2019). This seems to have benefited Vox, which gained institutional presence in the first elections that were held outside of Catalonia after October 2017's Catalan independence movement's frustrated attempt at secession, which constitutes the worst political crisis that the Spanish political system has experienced since the reestablishment of democracy in 1977.

The independence process in Catalonia that began in 2012 and culminated in October 2017 with the breakdown of the constitutional order. After the holding of an illegal referendum, and subsequent declaration of independence, the Spanish government applied Article 155 of the Constitution, which implied the suspension of the Catalan government, with part of its members shortly after being imprisoned accused of rebellion, sedition, embezzlement and disobedience. The dynamics of political competition that had been installed between the different pro-independence parties for some years was very much behind this escalate.

This competition dynamic is reminiscent of the outbidding thesis formulated by Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle (1972), which holds that the radicalization of competition between the different parties in one of the ethnic spaces ends up fueling the same competition in the other spaces and leading to increased polarization. The parties compete among themselves and adopt increasingly

radical strategies to obtain support from the national group they aspire to represent. Thus each new offer from one of the nationalist parties, is corresponded by its competitor with a more extreme demand, giving rise to a true auction whose consequences are unpredictable.

This is what has happened in Catalonia since 2012 between CiU, the main Catalan nationalist party, which to that point was not a secessionist, and ERC, a smaller but openly pro-independence party (Barrio & Rodríguez-Teruel, 2017). This competition ended up feeding the CUP, a radical left independence party that conditioned governance and whose support ended up leading the rest of the parties to hold an illegal self-determination referendum on October 1, 2017 (Barrio and Field, 2018). The nationalist radicalization in Catalonia caused an increase in polarization that ended up benefiting Ciudadanos, a Catalan-born party which is very hostile to Catalan nationalism, having emerged as the main detractor of the independence process, and that became Catalonia's first party in the 2017 (Barrio and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2016).

In the same way that Ciudadano's growth in Catalonia owes much of its success to the increased polarization, Vox's rise as of 2018 can be explained by the growing competition between Ciudadanos and PP, at a time when the latter had lost hegemony in the right political spectrum and was very weakened after leaving government as a result of the Gurtel Case ruling. Just as in Catalonia the clashes between the defunct CiU and ERC fueled the growth of a third more radical party like the CUP, nationalist competition between Ciudadanos and PP has fueled Vox's growth of Vox: an "unashamed" Spanish nationalist party. This does not mean that Vox has not benefited from other factors—in particular, as noted, the decline of the PP due to corruption and the strategic turn of Ciudadanos—, but the window of opportunity that helps explain its abrupt organizational and electoral growth is the Catalan crisis the auction dynamic between some of the Spanish parties that originated as a consequence, something that the Rabushka and Shepsle model anticipated.

## Vox's origins and trajectory

### The initial failure

As already noted, Vox's birth is part of the cycle of new parties emergence in the heat of the political, economic and social discontent caused by the 2008 economic crisis. Vox was born at the end of 2013, simultaneously with Podemos, and parallel to Ciudadanos' conversion into a state-level party. While Podemos aspired to politically capitalize on the 15M mobilizations (Rodríguez-Teruel et al. 2016), and Ciudadanos wanted to benefit from their rise in Catalonia as a consequence of the sovereignist process (Rodríguez-Teruel & Barrio 2016), Vox emerged as an initiative of former members of the PP and centrists that were disenchanted with the conservative party's management of the economic crisis and with its numerous corruption scandals, some of them being related to previous internal movements to displace Mariano Rajoy before his 2011 arrival to Spanish government. Its promoters included Santiago Abascal, who was a townhall councillor for the PP in the Basque Country during the final phase of "the lead years" and later a regional representative, being persecuted and threatened by ETA. Later on Abascal was linked to Esperanza Aguirre, the president of Madrid's Autonomous Community that had challenged Rajoy in the 2008 caucus. Aguirre hired Abascal in 2010 to direct Madrid's Data Protection Agency, and later as managing director for the Foundation for Patronage and Social Sponsorship, that was dissolved the same day Vox was founded. Other participants were José Antonio Ortega Lara, a prison official, also a former member of the PP and sadly famous for having been the victim of the longest known kidnapping by ETA (532 days), Ignacio Camuñas, former minister of the UCD, and José Luis González Quirós, philosopher and former member of UCD and the PP, who was very close to José María Aznar through FAES (authoring many of his speeches), and Vox's provisional president. The party's birth was justified during its first public presentation as a response to the a multidimensional crisis being faced by Spain: economic crisis, institutional crisis, crisis of values and crisis of national unity. Like many of the new parties, Vox emphasized regeneration and democratic revitalization ideas, as well as the need to promote institutional reforms, especially regarding the State model and the status and functioning of political parties.

Vox's first elections were the 2014 European elections. As is well known European elections, due to their single constituency tend to favor small and new parties, but also due to the electorate perceiving them as second-order elections, which allows for certain innovations. Aleix Vidal Quadras, until then a PP MEP and former leader of that party in Catalonia known for his hostility towards Catalan nationalism,

was Vox European Parliament candidate and its first president. The 2014 elections saw the new Spanish parties into the European Parliament, but Vox was barely 1,500 votes away from obtaining representation. The party's initial failure triggered an internal crisis which resulted in Vidal Quadras' and other party founders like Ignacio Camuñas' resignations. Santiago Abascal, secretary general until that day, was elected president. The new leader was characterized by his exacerbated nationalism. He had been founder of the DENAES (Defense of the Spanish Nation) foundation, built around philosopher Gustavo Bueno's thought —with whose son Abascal had published the 2001 book *In defense of Spain*—, and of the Foundation for Patronage and Social Sponsorship.

However, Vox's management changes did not improve its luck. The party presented candidacies in most autonomous communities in the 2015 regional elections, and both the 2015 and 2016 general elections with a program entitled "Make Spain Great Again" that emulated Donald Trump's slogan, but it remained an extra-parliamentary force in all of them. The only area where it gained presence, however testimonial, was in local elections where it obtained 22 townhall councilors from the 120 candidacies they presented.

In addition to the nationalist appeal, Vox designed a penetration strategy based on approaching social sectors dissatisfied with some policies developed by the PP and PSOE: pro-life movements, defense of the family values and traditional gender identity, citizens who felt aggravated by laws against gender violence (mostly men); hunting and bullfighting associations (whose practices are increasingly criminalized by animal rights movements and in some cases prohibited or limited); immigration critics, especially as a consequence of the media impact of the refugee crisis; and citizens that felt discontent towards the historical memory law, finding shelter in Vox's exploitation of identity politics. By mobilizing these issues, the party placed itself within the orbit of various European radical right-wing parties. The party even attended the Koblenz summit held in January 2017 in which the National Front, Alternative for Germany or Geert Wilders' Freedom Party also participated. Contacts exploring the idea of joining The Movement<sup>1</sup> were also made with Steve Bannon, with Rafael Bardají, who had been an advisor to former president José María Aznar at the FAES foundation, being present, however no meeting between Abascal and Bannon seems to have taken place.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.eldiario.es/politica/Steve-Bannon-Europa-Espana-PP\\_0\\_843766124.html](https://www.eldiario.es/politica/Steve-Bannon-Europa-Espana-PP_0_843766124.html)

## The Catalan springboard

Of all the factors that gave impetus to the party, the main one was the perception that the unity of Spain was being threatened as a result of the sovereignty process in Catalonia, along with the feelings that the other parties were not fighting it with enough fierceness. Ever since its birth, Vox was the party with a more belligerent position in this regard (even more so than Ciudadanos), to the point of having several filed claims and being popular accusation in the trial against the independence leaders (members of the Catalan government and of the Catalan parliament's President's chair), whom they accuse of rebellion, embezzlement and disobedience crimes for the September and October 2017 events that led to the holding of an illegal independence referendum on October 1 and the declaration of independence of Catalonia. Their criticisms were not limited to the pro-independence sphere but extended to PP and Ciudadanos for their management of the conflict and for their responsibility regarding their (weak) application of Article 155 of the Constitution by virtue of which the Mariano Rajoy executive ceased the Catalan government and dissolved the parliament calling elections.

A new independentist victory after the December 21 regional elections, along with perception that applying Article 155 had not helped in weakening the movement, sharpened criticism and stimulated the demand for greater toughness by Ciudadanos, thus starting a competitive outbidding dynamic. Ciudadanos had won first place in the Catalan elections, and according to various polls this strategy seemed to favor them also in the State-level arena, thus feeding their expectations of surpassing the PP and becoming the first party of the right, which in turn implied moving away from the more centrist electorate—something that was evidenced by their refusal to support PSOE's no confidence vote against Mariano Rajoy after the Gürtel Case ruling proved that the PP had benefited from a corrupt plot. The no confidence vote's success, partly due to pro-independence parties' support, allowed socialist Pedro Sánchez's new presidency and triggered the PP's leader replacement, with Pablo Casado as new president of the PP instilling greater harshness regarding the independence movement as a response to the growing competition from Ciudadanos. Precisely this competition dynamic is where Vox's growth ought to be located. At the same time the party also benefited from considerable media relevance, especially regarding its role as popular accusation during the trials against the pro-independence leaders. Their demand for high penalties during the trial as well as its long-standing opposition to the state of the autonomies placed Vox as the more radicalized party regarding the national question and as Spain's main defender against the secessionist threat. Again, according to the auction

thesis predictions, competition in an ethnic space ends up favoring the emergence and growth of parties with the most extreme positions, since they have greater credibility in defending the ethnic group.

Meanwhile, Vox has exhibited a resounding opposition to some policies by the new socialist government, particularly to the decision to exhume General Franco from the Valle de los Caídos in application of the historical memory laws, and to gender policies at a time when the feminist movement is highly mobilized as a consequence of #MeToo and the success of the feminist strike on March 8, 2017—which in Spain had a massive following. Against this backdrop, in early October, just a few weeks before the Andalusian elections, Vox held a massive event in Vistalegre—oddly enough the same setting chosen by Podemos a few years earlier for its debut—, gathering over 9,000 people under the motto the "the living Spain" [La España Viva]. At the time, the polls did not yet reflect Vox's electoral progress, but its remarkable organizational growth was evident. As the Andalusian election campaign progressed, the party's expectations grew and it finally obtained over 395,000 votes and 12 seats in the regional parliament that were crucial for the government's institution. Vox signed a legislature agreement with the PP that it would rule in coalition with Ciudadanos, a party that was reluctant any agreement with a radical right-wing force.

Since then, Vox's expectations increased in the face of the each new different level election: April 28 general elections, and May 26 regional, municipal and European elections. In fact, according to all polls, Vox would become a relevant actor in all political levels. This momentum allowed Vox to present candidacies in all constituencies for the general and regional elections and also for local ones in many municipalities. It was also able to attract some small radical right-wing formations such as PxC<sup>2</sup> and to integrate some candidates from the traditional extreme right into their lists—who in some cases have resigned from running for election—, although no organic integration has taken place.

## Ideology

Vox's ideology can be found in its Founding Manifesto<sup>3</sup>, and especially in the "100 measures for the Living Spain" [100 medidas para la España Viva] document<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://cat.elpais.com/cat/2019/02/16/catalunya/1550343686\\_509605.html](https://cat.elpais.com/cat/2019/02/16/catalunya/1550343686_509605.html)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.voxespana.es/manifiesto-fundacional-vox>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.voxespana.es/biblioteca/espana/2018m/gal\\_c2d72e181103013447.pdf](https://www.voxespana.es/biblioteca/espana/2018m/gal_c2d72e181103013447.pdf)

However, there is no exhaustive development of their ideological position through congressional documents as is usually the case for most parties. Both the Foundational Manifesto and their programs reveal a series of basic axes that allow us to deduce their political ideology. Vox is essentially a nationalist party, traditionalist in moral terms, economically liberal, antifeminist, nativist, concerned about security issues, moderately Eurosceptic, and with a "regenerationist" vocation. Broadly speaking, these axes seem to match the programmatic principles of radical right-wing parties, although the latter's usual populist component seems to be diluted in Vox's case. Indeed, Vox challenges the established parties, and calls for democratic regeneration and the need to undertake institutional reforms in the face of the degradation that they claim has been caused by the party State— especially as a result of the corruption scandals that affect large parties . However, Vox does not emphasize the characteristic elite-people dualism found in populism. This could be attributed, partly, to the fact that its main leaders, from Aleix Vidal Quadras to Santiago Abascal, have been members of the PP, holding both representative positions and free appointment ones, making contradictionless *anti-caste* rhetoric difficult for the party. Furthermore, Vox does not conceive politics as a struggle between a corrupt political elite and a homogeneous and virtuous people, nor does it show a predilection for popular sovereignty over other elements of liberal democracy. Like most parties in the Western world, Vox certainly does not escape a certain populist contagion, particularly with regard to the moralization of political life, however it does not meet the set of requirements that academic literature usually defines populism with.

Vox's most characteristic feature is its nationalism, from which arises a vital concern for Spain's (territorial) unity, which they perceive as threatened by both Catalan nationalism—initially autonomist and mutated into secessionist—, and by Basque nationalism—which until recently, in addition to the democratic parties, also included the recently disbanded terrorist group ETA. The party is very critical of the decentralized political model stemming from the 1978 Constitution—the so-called "state of the autonomies"—, which is criticized as dysfunctional, excessive spending generating, and incapable of integrating peripheral nationalisms, having favored Spain's transformation into an administratively decentralized unitary state that recognizes its cultural, linguistic and institutional plurality while emphasizing the Spanish's hegemony throughout the territory. Vox also proposes policy centralization regarding health, educational and cultural issues, as well as in economic and industrial promotion, proposing an homogeneous financing system and the repeal of the Basque and Navarrese financing system. Hence their proud self-description as a single party for all of Spain—meaning they don't have regional

sister parties. Symbolically Vox poses its rise as a sort of reconquest of Spain, accordingly beginning its campaign for the general elections in Covadonga, where the battle led by Don Pelayo that is considered the beginning of the Reconquest [*la Reconquista*] took place.

Vox's staunch defense of Spain's unity and its historical continuity goes as far as proposing the outlawing of pro-independence political organizations, implicitly—never explicitly, though—proposing a militant democracy model, which the Spanish constitution does not provide support for. Displaying an uninhibited nationalism, the party proposes a plan to disseminate and protect national identity, while also embracing the term "*facha*" (short for fascist), derogatorily used in Spain to refer to people within the reactionary and nationalist ideological spectrum. Vox is also very belligerent with Historical Memory [*Memoria Histórica*] laws seeking to compensate the victims of persecution and/or violence during the Spanish Civil War and subsequent dictatorship, and as already indicated, opposes the relocation of General Franco's remains approved by the socialist government.

Vox's traditionalism is especially identifiable in its support for the traditional family model which, in accordance to this ideological current, it conceives as an institution that is previous to the State. The party aims to promote birth rates, improve tax benefits for large families and subsidies for mothers [*sic*], and also proposes the exclusion of both abortion and gender reassignment surgery from the catalog of free public health benefits. It also raises the need for parental control in order to authorize any school activities containing ethical, social, civic, moral or sexual content—the so-called "parental pin".

Traditionalism can also be identified in Vox's use of the idea of being "rooted in the land", as well as its emphasis on promoting folkloric and traditional activities, mainly through the protection of bullfighting as part of Spain's cultural heritage. Along the same lines the party promotes the rural world—in doing so aiming to guarantee equal opportunities throughout the territory—, and is committed to protecting hunting— understood as both a necessary and a traditional activity in that environment.

From an economic standpoint Vox's party manifesto is indisputably liberal. It proposes public spending reduction, the elimination of certain public agencies (linked in most cases to the existence of a multilevel government system), the cutting down of income and company taxes, and also the reduction of both company constitution and self-employed workers fees. Consequently, it also defends the elimination of wealth

and inheritance taxes as well as taxes on donations and capital gains, and proposes that pensions should be exempt from taxation. Also noteworthy are the party's land liberalization proposals (allowing for its conversion to developable land), its pension system reform plan for it to evolve towards a mixed system of capitalization and distribution, and regarding education its defense of school checks.

In addition, Vox shows an open hostility towards feminism, whom it accuses—just as other radical right movements do—of promoting gender ideology. The party defends the suppression of feminist organizations, the elimination of quotas, and proposes the repeal of the law on gender violence—since it is considered as discriminating against men—, arguing for the need for its replacement by a law on domestic violence according to which all sides have the right to same treatment.

Security is another of Vox's core issues. The party proposes the toughening of both the penalties and the conditions for convicts, as well as the abolition of the Schengen space until there is a European guarantee that it will not be used to evade justice. The latter is a clear reference to the Catalan politicians who fled Spain knowing that most likely both the Belgian and German justices would refuse to extradite them, however Vox also extends this towards the prevention of internal migratory flows by non-EU citizens. The party also defends imprisonment for life for former members of the already dissolved terrorist group ETA, as well as public office disqualification for life for those who ever supported it or its different political expressions. Other proposals regarding security involve the right for citizens to carry weapons and to defend their homes, and even to have citizens who kill or injure criminals in their home in legitimate defense awarded<sup>5</sup>.

A typically radical right nativist component is noticeable in Vox's position regarding immigration, which strictly links it to economic needs and prioritizes nationalities of Hispanic origin. The party is in favor of the deportation of both illegal immigrants and legal immigrants that have committed serious crimes, as well as making it impossible for illegal immigrants to regularize their status and access public subsidies, and suppress the "*arraigo*" procedure that allows for the acceleration of the regularization of people in an exceptional irregular situation. Like Donad Trump, Vox proposes the construction of a wall between Ceuta and Melilla and Morocco, and demands that it be paid for by Morocco. The party also shows a remarkable hostility towards Islam and proposes the shutdown of fundamentalist mosques led by fundamentalist imams, the exclusion of the teaching of Islam in schools, and at

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20190326/461252527266/vox-pide-premiar-matar-herir-criminal.html>

the same time it invokes the need to apply the reciprocity principle when opening new worship places. Furthermore, Vox argues for the need to create an agency whose aim would be to help threatened Christian minorities.

Regarding democratic regeneration, the party proposes an electoral system reform, less party control over candidate lists, and the elimination of quotas. It also proposes a stricter system of public office control of incompatibilities, as well as the elimination of political parties' public funding. Vox also proposes a reduction of the number of municipalities and local representatives, as well as the number of political advisers. It also proposes that the appointment of new members of the General Council of the Judicial Power (*Consejo General del Poder Judicial*) and the Supreme Court should be merit-based, and that the latter should carry out the Constitutional Court's duties, which should be eliminated in turn.

Vox's position regarding the European Union is ambivalent. The Founding Manifesto does not contain any reference, whether positive or negative, with regards to Europe, from which it follows that it is not a central question for the party. Its party manifesto for the 2014 European elections contains a generic aspiration to improve institutional functioning and European policies, as well as to deepen democracy. Starting in 2015, the year of the refugee crisis, Vox showed its predilection for the Visegrad group's positions on migration issues, and began to opt for a more intergovernmental functioning of the EU, and for a more explicit rejection of supranationalism and of any kind of sub-state participation in European decisions. However, Vox did not question Spain's EU membership, which explains for the fact that it joined the Eurocritical parties' group rather than the Europhobic parties' group. After the European elections Vox joined the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, distancing itself from the attempt, promoted by Steve Bannon, to form a unified group of the radical right under Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini's leadership.

## **Organization and funding**

As has already been pointed out, and as is usually the case for new parties, one of Vox's central arguments is criticism towards established parties. Vox does not escape this trend, and considers that old parties such as PP and PSOE threaten the democracy's quality, and are to blame for institutional degradation. These parties, according to Vox, have also contributed to citizens' distancing from politics due to

an excessive control over candidate lists, which according to the different Spanish electoral laws should be closed and blocked at all levels—with the exception of the Senate, which is elected using open and unblocked candidate lists. Hence their proposal for a new electoral law that guarantees a more direct link between representatives and those represented, and for a reform of the parties law that ensures their democratic functioning and the transparency of their funding sources.

In line with these arguments, in its Foundational Manifesto Vox proposed holding at a maximum biannual frequency caucuses open to all party members. It also opted for the direct election of internal positions and candidates by party members through primary elections. Initially the party was organized in accordance with these principles and included them in its first internal regulations. All internal positions running for candidates for elected public office were hence elected through primary election processes—with the exception of constituencies with less than fifty members, in which case a candidate list endorsed by at least half plus one of the number of affiliates in that constituency, and with national executive's approval, would suffice.

The party stuck to this *modus operandi* until its 2017 exponential growth triggered changes in the interests of efficiency that have brought Vox closer to the party model of those parties it had hitherto scorned. In the General Assembly held in February 2019, it limited the scope of the primary elections to internal positions (National Executive Committee presidents, Provincial Executive Committees presidents, and Autonomous Cities presidents, along with their respective lists). The appointment of candidates for elected positions henceforth became dependent on the territorial executives, who would in turn be responsible for raising their proposal to the national executive for approval—except for the general and European elections, in which case only the consultation of the territorial executives is necessary<sup>6</sup>. A centralized model for the appointment of candidates has since been adopted, far from the initial postulates, and which confirms Michels' old iron law of oligarchy, according to which the larger the parties, the more their tendency to become bureaucratized and specialized in order to make quick decisions.

However, beyond the initial introduction of inclusive mechanisms for position and candidate selection, Vox does not offer—like other new parties do—many opportunities for party members' internal participation, such as their involvement in the preparation and approval of manifestos or in the ratification of electoral agreements or government pacts. Quite the contrary, since although the highest

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.voxespana.es/Pdf/113-elecciones-Jljdskisd98ujn8UkkJhBn65.pdf>

organ of the party—the General Assembly—is of universal access, all members (which are up to date in their payment of fees) can participate, and it meets annually for accounts approval and every four years for leadership election (the periodicity was every two years until 2019)<sup>7</sup>, Vox has adopted a highly centralized and presidential operating pattern that, as it has become institutionalized, has been intensified, as evidenced by the change candidate selection criteria. Furthermore, the party's central leadership is also very restricted. The highest executive body is the National Executive Committee, which is made up of 11 members that are chosen from a single list. The main unipersonal positions are the President, who holds the highest executive and representative powers, and the General Secretary, who exercises organizational functions, and on whom a variable number of vice-secretaries, three vice-presidents, a treasurer, and three spokesman depend. The party's first President was Aleix Vidal Quadras, who resigned after his failure in the European elections, being replaced by Santiago Abascal. José Ortega Smith is the General Secretary. Between caucuses there is no extended body with decision-making capacity, since the Political Council elected by the General Assembly only has consultative functions.

Regarding its framework, Vox has adopted a classic organizational structure following section model patterns, with local, provincial and national bodies. Given Spain's territorial structure, it is striking that Vox organizational structure lacks a regional level, which most parties show, enjoy varying degrees of autonomy. This absence, however, is consistent with the party's opposition to the existence of the State of Autonomies. Currently the party is established in most Spanish provinces. Membership is exclusively territorial-based, and the use of new technologies has not been intensively exploited, whether to promote internal participation, or to promote the existence of a virtual community—as the rest of the new parties in Spain have done. On the other hand, the party makes very extensive use of social networks for communication purposes—being the party with the most followers on Instagram—, and it also makes use of distribution channels such as WhatsApp or Telegram, where it viralizes content. The supporter/ sympathizer figure is also key, since it implies collaboration and participation in party activities but without having financial obligations.

From its birth until 2017 the party had around 3,200 members, but from that moment on it grew exponentially. Especially between September and October

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<sup>7</sup> If a mandate's end coincides with a national electoral period, it will be prolonged until the new Government is formed.

2017—coinciding with the October 1 Catalan referendum—its membership increased by 20 percent. According to the party's own data, in 2018 it reached 18,700 members and in the 2019 General Assembly—after its Andalusian elections success—it announced that it had exceeded 36,000 members. After the general election repetition membership went over 52,000<sup>8</sup>. It must be noted that there are various forms of economic contribution depending on each party members' profile.

Their criticism of the traditional parties has led him to defend the suppression of public funding for parties (also unions and business organizations and unions) with the exception of that of the Parliamentary and Municipal Groups. As is usual, public funding for parties, both the ordinary one linked to their daily activities and the extraordinary one linked to their electoral expenses, is conditioned on their access to institutions. Its scarce institutional presence until now explains why since its birth in the party's accounts only the membership fees and donations appear, being spatially large in 2014, when the European elections were held and 2018, years in which it experienced strong growth. The contributions of 2014 have been the subject of controversy as many of them proceed, more than 800,000 and this has been recognized by Aleix Vidal Quadras, candidate for the European elections and first president of the party, of individuals linked to the National Council of the Resistance of Iran (CNRI), a far-left Iranian opposition group in exile, with whom the candidate had a close relationship. At the moment, although his access to the Parliament of Andalusia allows him to access the reimbursement of part of his electoral expenses in his 2018 accounts, they still do not appear but neither does it appear that he has explicitly renounced it as he defends in his programs. So far, he has received the amount of electoral expenses, corresponding to his access to the institutions, and maintains his proposal for a 50% reduction in public funds and has promised to limit his expenses and return the surplus.

Like many new parties and taking advantage of the opportunities offered by new technologies, it carries out micro-financing campaigns, in many cases to support its intense judicial activism against the Catalan independence movement. Also noteworthy is the collection of the Vistalegre act in 2018 and the more than 150,000 euros obtained for the electoral campaign. For the general elections in April he launched a campaign to raise one million euros, of which he got 727,000, far from the proposed goal. In the face of the electoral repetition, Vox could already benefit from the financing of the campaign

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.larazon.es/espana/vox-suma-10000-afiliados-mas-que-el-28-a-y-llega-a-52000-IE25471696/>

## Electoral and parliamentary force

The first time that Vox ran for election was in the 2014 European elections, where it obtained 246,833 votes and got very close to obtaining parliamentary representation. From that moment up until the 2018 the Andalusian elections Vox's electoral results were very marginal. During 2015 and 2016 Vox ran for general elections as well as for several municipal and regional elections, however the party only obtained representation at the local level and only exceeded 1% of votes in the elections to Madrid's Assembly and the Autonomous City of Ceuta. Vox's organizational weakness and its scarce territorial implementation were so evident through those years that its leader—Santiago Abascal—run as number one candidate not only for the general elections, but also for elections to Madrid's Assembly and Basque Parliament.

The 2018 Andalusian elections marked a turning point in the party's trajectory not only because it reached the representation threshold, but also that of relevance, since its seats became essential in order for a change of Andalusian government to take place as well as for overall governability. This provided the party with an extraordinary visibility and projection throughout Spain. Vox gave the PP's candidate its parliamentary support after signing a programmatic agreement with that party. Surprisingly that agreement was not signed by Ciudadanos, a party that also entered the Andalusian government but seemed suspicious signing any direct agreements with radical right-wing formations.

Results for the April 28 general election confirmed what could be expected from polls, although Vox's results were not as high as some polls had suggested during the final days of the campaign. The party obtained over 2.67 million votes (more than 10%) and 24 seats, becoming Spain's fifth political force and the most benefited from the PP's decline. However, the party's aspirations to repeat a scenario like that of Andalusia, and becoming a determining political force were frustrated, since the sum of three right-wing parties did not reach an absolute majority, mainly due to PSOE's remarkable recovery. The exact same scenario took place in the Valencian Community, where elections were held on the same day. There Vox also exceeded 10% of the vote, but the left obtained majority again, thus revalidating the autonomous community's government.

As expected, voting fragmentation within the right-wing space had a negative impact for Vox in the small constituencies, where it did not obtain representation. The three right-wing parties stayed well below the numbers required for an

absolute majority, although their total votes—around 11 million—remained roughly the same as in the previous elections. However, in percentual terms they fell over three points, the lost seats due to not having run conjointly. If in 2016 the sum of PP and Ciudadanos gave 169 seats, after the 2019 elections, and adding Vox's seats, they only retained 147.

Vox obtained its best results in the autonomous communities of Murcia, Castilla La Mancha, Castilla y León, Andalusia and the Valencian Community—where regional elections were also held on that same day. In these elections, Vox slightly exceeded 10% of the votes and obtained 10 seats, although they were useless for government formation. In historical autonomous communities presenting nationalist and regionalist parties with a strong sense of identity—such as Catalonia, Galicia, the Basque Country or the Canary Islands—Vox's electoral base is weaker, to the point that in Catalonia they obtained just one seat. This low electoral weight is consistent with their hostility towards peripheral nationalism, with their commitment to a return to centralism, and with their will to ban secessionist parties.

In those elections, the party's votes came mainly from former voters of a declining PP—which obtained the worst result in its history—and, to a lesser extent, from voters coming from Ciudadanos who, despite a leak of its electorate towards Vox, experienced a remarkable advance. According to preliminary analysis, over 1.5 million votes obtained by Vox came from the PP, and almost half a million from Ciudadanos, in addition to 150,000 former PSOE voters and 155,000 Podemos voters.

The regional, municipal and European elections held a month after the parliamentary elections seemed to suggest a certain stagnation in Vox's projection, probably because its expectations of being decisive throughout Spain were not met, and right-wing electorate perceived the harmful effects that fragmentation. The party could not reach the 10% mark obtained month earlier in any autonomous community, and only came close to that in Murcia, Madrid and the Balearic Islands, where it exceeded 8%. There were several regions in which it did not obtain representation, such as the Canary Islands, Castilla la Mancha, Extremadura, Navarra and La Rioja, again evidencing its difficulties in territorial penetration. In the remaining autonomous communities, regardless of having obtained a seat, the party's position had no impact on governance. The only exceptions to this tendency were Madrid and Murcia, where the right-wing agreements such as the one signed in Andalusia between Ciudadanos and PP were reissued with Vox's support.

The results of the municipal elections confirmed this stalemate. In global terms, Vox did not reach a million votes, which represented less than 3.57% of the total, and obtained only 529 representatives, thus remaining in a very marginal position in the Spanish municipal sphere. Only in the city of Madrid could Vox join an absolute majority, obtaining a relevant position. Combined with its role at the Autonomous Community level, the party has gained remarkable visibility, while also camouflaging its generalized regression with respect to the general elections.

The following European elections—regardless of the fact that second-degree elections voters are more prone to protest or experimental votes—confirmed the party's downward trend. Vox only obtained 3 seats, with almost half its votes for the general elections, and a 6.2% that was far from the 10% obtained then.

The general election repetition after "Catalonia's hot October"—that was a result of the sentencing of pro-independence leaders—was a new impetus for Vox, which became the third Spanish political force. In these elections the party obtained 3,640,063 votes, 15.09% and 52 seats. However, its advance, despite the PP's incipient recovery, was not enough to forge a right-wing majority due to Ciudadanos' collapse. Regarding the April elections, Vox grew in all the Autonomous Communities. It became first political force in the Region of Murcia—with more than 28% of the votes—, as in Ceuta, where with 35% of the votes granted Vox the only seat at stake. In Andalusia Vox obtained over 20%, and in most Communities it exceeded 15%. Only in Galicia, La Rioja and the Basque Country—where it remained without representation— was Vox around or below 10%, while it obtained its representation for the first time in the Canary Islands, Ceuta, Cantabria and Navarra.

At the end of the 2018-2019 electoral cycle, Vox had gone from being a marginal and extra-parliamentary party to being third party in Spanish politics, and being present at different government levels, from local to European, and, in some cases, as in Madrid—both the city and the autonomous community— and in the regions of Andalusia and Murcia, with a relevant position for governance.

Table 1. Vox's electoral results (2014-2019)

Election	Votes	%	Seats
2014 European Parliament	246,833	1.56	0
2015 General	58,114	0.23	0
2015 Municipal*	64,385	0.29	17
2015 Autonomous Communities (CCAA)			
Andalucía	18,017	0.45	0
Asturias	3,176	0.59	0
Canarias	1,853	0.2	0
Cantabria	1,092	0.34	0
Castilla la Mancha	5,277	0.48	0
Castilla León	9,219	0.68	0
Extremadura	1,773	0.28	0
C. de Madrid	37,043	1.17	0
C. de Murcia	5,513	0.87	0
C. Valenciana	10,184	0.41	0
2016 General	47,182	0.2	0
2016 CCAA País Vasco	774	0.07	0
2018 CCAA Andalucía	395,978	10.97	12
2019 General	2,677,173	10.26	24
2019 CCAA			
Aragón	40,263	6.08	3
Asturias	33,784	6.42	2
Baleares	34,668	8.12	3
Canarias	22,021	2.47	0
Cantabria	16,392	5.05	2
Castilla la Mancha	75,636	7.02	0
Castille León	75,331	5.49	1
Extremadura	28,849	4.7	0
C. de Madrid	285,099	8.86	12
C. de Murcia	61,591	9.46	4
Navarra	4,401	1.29	0
La Rioja	6,277	3.86	0
C. de Valencia	278,947	10.44	10
2019 Municipal	813,282	3.57	529
2019 European Parliament	1,388,681	6.20	3
2019 General	3,640,063	15.09	52

\*In coalition with Familia y Vida  
Sources: Ministerio del Interior and El País.

## Conclusion

Vox's appearance in the 2018-2019 electoral cycle can be explained by the Spanish multilevel party system's openness, by its tendency towards fragmentation, and by the growing polarization around the national question that the Spanish political system has experienced since the autumn 2017 Catalan crisis. Vox, which emerged in 2014 along with Podemos and Ciudadanos due to the discontent caused by the economic crisis and corruption scandals, only began to take off in the Andalusian elections of 2018, which were the first at the state level after of the Catalan crisis, and also coincided with a moment of great weakness of the PP—the party supplying most of its voters. That moment also saw the peak of PP and Ciudadanos's competition regarding the national question. A behavior in line with the outbidding competition model developed by Rabushka and Shepsle, which predicts that the radicalization of ethnic competition in a space—in this case first the Catalan—ends up feeding the same competition in the other space—the Spanish—, as has happened.

Vox is primarily a Spanish nationalist party fueled by the Catalan secessionist threat. Its nationalism, accompanied by a Catholic, nativist and xenophobic component, is particularly hostile towards Muslim immigration, it defends traditions such as bullfighting and hunting, and is very critical of gender ideology. However, it is not an anti-European or an essentially populist party. Like many new parties opposing established ones, Vox makes use of a certain populist rhetoric. However, neither the dualistic division of society nor the non-liberal component can be considered central elements of its ideology. By means of this radical right-wing discourse Vox has managed access to all Spanish institutional levels—from the local to European level—, holding relevant positions in some areas. This marks the end of the so-called Spanish exception, since henceforth the country not only has a radical right-wing party, but one that has become Spanish politics' third party. After Vox's electoral success, its sudden access to institutions and its remarkable growth, the party now faces the challenge—given the new circumstances—of institutionalization and adaptation at the organizational level. Although not a governmental political force, Vox seems to be displaying a remarkable capacity to introduce issues on the political agenda and condition other parties' positions on them—especially the PP. Hence the question is whether it will end up being a tribunitian function party or one with the capacity to influence the Spanish political agenda.

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# Vox and party competition in Spain: electoral breakthrough and evolution (2018-2021)

**Juan Rodríguez Teruel**

## Introduction

Like Social Democracy, mainstream center-right parties are experiencing turbulent times. As *The Economist* recently stated, the crisis of traditional right-wing parties has turned conservatism into the "the most under threat [idea] in the West" due to the fact that new right-wing actors are not "an evolution of conservatism, but a repudiation of it" (2019, 9). The arrival of radical right challengers has altered traditional competition for right-wing electorate's support (Mudde, 2007). New patterns of party competition within the right-wing spectrum have been identified by the literature, whereby mainstream right-wing parties try to contain competing emerging radical right forces. Two mechanisms have been particularly damaging

for traditional liberal and conservative parties: anti-incumbency vote has tended to penalize incumbent parties that were in office during recession years (Downes & Loveless, 2018); and anti-immigration vote has fueled the support for those challenger far-right parties that took hard stances, in times of economic crisis, against immigrants and other scapegoats like the EU (Pardos-Prado, 2015; Szöcsik & Polyakova, 2018).

Spain provides a major case of such transformation in the political Right for two reasons. On the one hand, Partido Popular (People's Party, PP) stood as one of the strongest conservative parties in democratic Europe for almost three decades. Between 1990 and 2011, its electoral support in general elections smoothly fluctuated between 34.7 (1993) and 44.6 (2011) per cent of total voters. In 2011, the PP achieved one of the few single-party majorities in parliamentary Europe at that time. However, ever since, the party entered a downward spiral that ended up with a modest 16.7 per cent in the April 2019 election, its worst results in 40 years.

On the other hand, the PP's fast decline has run paralleled to the emergence of two challenger forces making their breakthrough in the right-wing electorate: Ciudadanos (Citizens) captured most of the centrist electorate between 2015 and 2019; whereas Vox became the main representative among the far right-wing voters. These parties' emergence was the mainstream conservative party's legitimacy crisis at the time, mostly related to party finance-related corruption and produced by the management of the territorial crisis in Catalonia. Among these new parties, Vox is probably the most disruptive force for two reasons: Spain has never had a far-right representative in the national parliament since the end of the transition to democracy; and at the same time it is the first major party to ever question some of Spanish democracy's main principles, such as political decentralization, and representative inclusiveness of political institutions (for instance, in gender or ethnic terms).

However, so far the political consequences of Vox's (and Ciudadanos') breakthrough have been mainly limited to the right-wing electorate. Total vote for right-wing parties did not decrease, but parliamentary representation within that spectrum was severely eroded, which in turn benefited the Left. Thus a counter-productive effect took place: despite the lack of structural factors usually identified by the literature as necessary drivers for the breakthrough of radical right forces, centrifugal-oriented competition between the existing parties—PP and Ciudadanos—stimulated the demand among many right-wing voters for a newcomer with radical views on disputed issues, like national identity and territorial devolution. Hence, Vox can be

considered the product of a party competition failure, rather than the expression of new radicalized voters' demands.

Following this argument, the chapter explains the particular political conditions surrounding Vox's emergence, and the latter's consequences for the Spanish party system. The next section will discuss the political reasons behind Vox's successful breakthrough in Spain. Then we will observe the political consequences for the party system: more fragmentation; more polarization. The fourth analytical section will analyze the electoral consequences in 2019 and the evolution afterwards. The last section will discuss Vox's future prospect in Spain.

## Some theoretical arguments about the radical right

Previous works have proposed, among others, two main sets of explanations regarding traditional party voters' support for right-wing parties. Some scholars have interpreted these parties as a conservative reaction to social disorders produced by the economic system, which would have created what has been condensed under the 'losers of globalization' idea (Betz, 1994; Rooduijn, 2015). From a cultural perspective, other authors explain the rise of ultraconservative and populist parties as a result of a crisis of democratic values (Ignazi, 1992; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In both cases, the result is the emergence of political forces that advocate xenophobic stances, Euroscepticism, hostility towards gender equality and ultra-conservative values (Kitschelt, 1995; Mudde, 2007).

However, both explanations are quite unsatisfactory when attempting to understand Vox's success. Unlike similar parties in other countries, Vox hardly obtains support from working-class voters, those with economic problems or those that were severely affected by the Great Recession (Oliván Navarro, 2021; Ortega & Montabes, 2020). This is the reason behind the fact that, to this day, PSOE and Podemos did not lose any more votes to Vox than those that could be expected from the natural flows between disparate parties. On the other hand, if we now turn to the so-called *culture wars hypothesis*, there is not much insight to be gained: while presently in Spain most voters with xenophobic or undemocratic ideas vote for Vox (Turnbull-Dugarte, Rama, & Santana, 2020), these values do not seem to be very relevant when the full spectrum of Vox's voters is analyzed. Hence, the peculiarity of this party's electoral rise in Spain must be approached beyond its ideology or its social or cultural origins (Acha, 2021).

Since traditional explanations for mainstream right wing parties' crisis dealing with the arrival of radical challengers do not apply fully satisfactorily to the Spanish case—i.e. anti-incumbency vote, economic grievances, controversies about the EU or immigration, the rise of illiberal populist values—, turning towards centrifugal party competition analysis could also be helpful in order to understand the rise of the radical right. Specifically, polarization has indeed become a major disruptive feature related to these parties. Overall, polarization is defined as the increase of ideological distances among voters and parties (Campbell, 2016; Dalton, 2008) and shapes decisively how political forces compete within the party system (Sartori, 1976). Previous studies have suggested that parties tend to adopt centrifugal strategies when voters move to the extremes (Cox, 1990; Merrill III & Adams, 2002), although this relationship is conditioned to the extent of voters' attachment to parties (Ezrow, de Vries, Steenbergen, & Edwards, 2011), to their propensity to abstain (Dreyer & Bauer, 2019), or the institutional incentives produced by the electoral system (Curini & Hino, 2012, 463).

However, political parties can also be drivers of polarization (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009, 17) and may adopt centrifugal strategies to compete with their adversaries, which in turn produces changes in voters' partisanship and ideological perceptions (Lupu, 2015). In this respect, the breakthrough of radical right parties has contributed to party-level increase in polarization in stable democracies (Castanho Silva, 2018), since it has led mainstream parties to change their platforms as a reaction against these new competitors (Mudde, 2013; Rooduijn, De Lange, & Van Der Brug, 2014). Aiming to face these challenges, mainstream right-wing parties may strategically emphasize those issues which they may deem most fruitful in order to mitigate electoral losses (de Vries & Hobolt, 2020; Downes & Loveless, 2018).

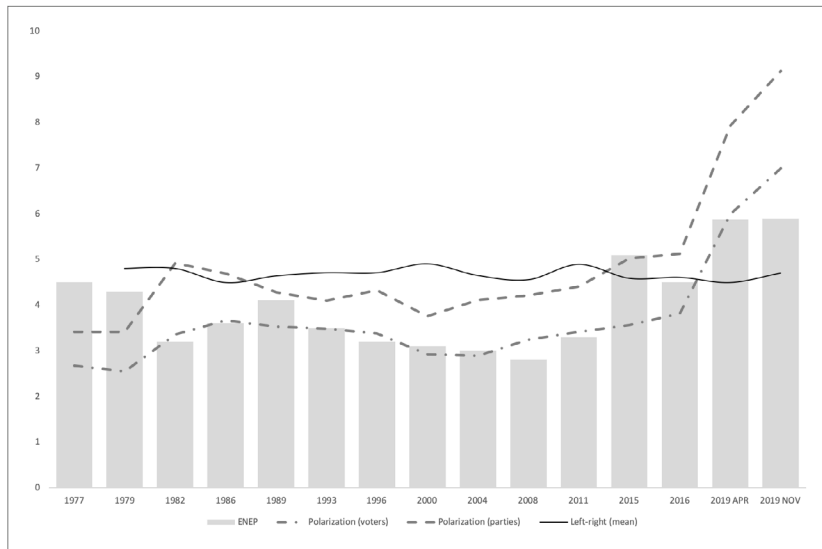
But what happens when party polarization does not follow but precede the arrival of radical-right forces; when there is no voter polarization? In this situation, mainstream parties may employ polarization as a competing device. According to previous studies, the increase in polarization is assumed to overall negatively affect party switching, hence reducing party volatility. This is due to the fact that when polarization is high, ideological distances between parties also increases, making a switch less likely (Dejaeghere & Dassonneville, 2017; Hazan, 1997). This tends to benefit parties already in parliament. Nevertheless, polarization may have paradoxical effects in situations where voter frustration and rage is present, and voters assume their vote will not prevent their ideological adversaries' victory. In this case choosing an anti-establishment party—the one generating the most rejection from adversaries—may become the last consolation. This is what has been called

an 'up yours' vote, which accounts for the Spanish context in which Vox emerged in late 2018 (Rodríguez-Teruel, 2020). In the next sections, we will explain how this contradictory outcome finally took place in Spain with Vox.

## Coordination failure in the Spanish right

The successful breakthrough of Vox was the result of an enormous 'coordination failure' (Cox, 1997) in the Spanish political Right. The consequence of such a failure has been the sharp increase of party fragmentation, as seen in Figure 1. Scholars usually explain party fragmentation through the analysis of the incentives provided by the electoral system and the cleavage structure (Golosov, 2015; Lijphart, 2012). However, in the event of such an important raise in the number of parties in a short span of time, the influence of structural factors may be less clear. In specific contexts, Lago & Martínez (2011, 8) suggest that new parties indicate the existence of market failures, produced by unsatisfied voters' demands and parties' inability to adapt to ideological and societal changes. However, internal party politics may also play a role in preventing electoral coordination. Indeed, following Boucek (2012), we can add that party leadership's inability to keep party cohesion within major parties may stimulate the split of members and factions (or the failure to integrate new members and groups) under difficult external conditions. This produces a coordination failure when there are incentives to launch new political organizations to better represent citizens' unsatisfied demands. In this vein, the electoral fragmentation in the Spanish Right was preceded by increasing organizational and political fragmentation in the party arena. Later on, the breakthrough of new actors strengthened the incentives for splitting the parties and switching to these new political forces.

Figure 1. Fragmentation and polarization in Spain (1977-2019)



Source: Own elaboration.

While a shrinking electoral evolution across the right-wing electorate took place, this process was far from homogenous. It started firstly among moderate voters. While the PP gathered 43 per cent voters self-locating in the center of the left-right axis (positions 5 and 6, representing almost a third of the total Spanish electorate) in the 2011 general election, this support fell below 23 per cent in both the 2015 and 2016 elections, achieving its lowest point (12.3 per cent) in the April 2019 elections. Subsequently, electoral fragmentation spread towards the furthest positions on the right (positions 8, 9 and 10, which cover less than 10 per cent of the electorate). While those voters used to be completely represented by the PP (85 per cent in 2011 and 79 percent in 2016), in the April 2019 elections its support dropped to 40.1 per cent, while Vox achieved 32.3 per cent and Ciudadanos 9.5 percent<sup>1</sup>. As a result, by November 2019 Vox had achieved a considerable amount of support ranging from centrist voters to the more extreme right-wing electorate, as seen in Figure 2.

<sup>1</sup> Source: CIS post electoral studies 2.920. 3.126 and 3.145.

Interestingly, these losses by no means entailed a collapse of the electoral support for the Right, as the total vote achieved by PP, Ciudadanos and Vox over the decade always remained above the PP's numbers in the 2008 general election. Hence, while the right-wing electorate was deeply fragmented, it did not necessarily become smaller. Indeed, the sum of the total support obtained by the right-wing national parties in 2016 and 2019 surpassed the PP's vote in 2011 (Table 1).

**Figure 2. Electoral support (%) for the main national parties in each position of the left-right scale in the 2019 November general election**

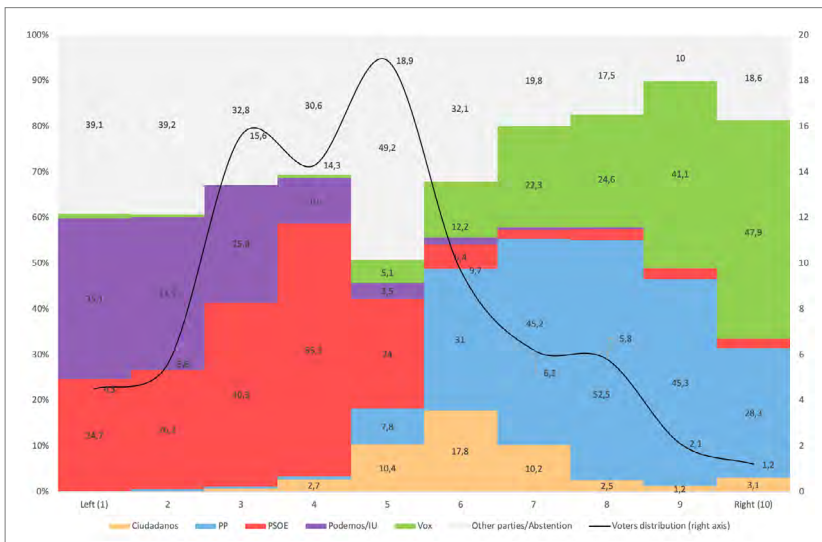


Table 1. Electoral support for PP, Ciudadanos and Vox in general elections

	March 2008	December 2011	December 2015	June 2016	April 2019	November 2019
<b>PP</b>						
Votes	10,278,010	10,866,566	7,236,965	7,941,236	4,373,653	5,047,040
%	39.9	44.6	28.7	33.0	16.7	20.8
Seats	154	186	123	137	66	89
<b>Ciudadanos</b>						
Votes	46,313	-	3,514,528	3,141,570	4,155,665	1,650,318
%	0.2	-	13.9	13.1	15.9	6.8
Seats	0	-	40	32	57	10
<b>Vox</b>						
Votes	-	-	-	-	2,688,092	3,656,979
%	-	-	-	-	10.26	15.1
Seats	-	-	-	-	24	52
<b>Total sum</b>						
Votes	10,324,323	10,866,566	10,751,493	11,082,806	11,217,410	10,354,337
%	40.1	44.6	42.6	46.1	42.8	42.7
Seats	154	186	163	169	147	151

Hence, political fragmentation within the right-wing space was a staggered process, which culminated with Vox's breakthrough in 2018. Vox can be mostly considered a political split from the PP's more conservative groups. It had been created in late 2013 by former conservative PP members that had recently left the party. Among them, current leader Santiago Abascal or longtime advisor for Aznar in foreign policy within the party foundation FAES Rafael Bardají. The first party chairman was Aleix Vidal Quadras, who had hold relevant regional and European offices as PP representative in the past. Their main criticism focused on the PP's tolerance regarding regional nationalisms and the Spanish model of devolution, but above all Vox defended traditional conservative values and principles in contrast with the PP's moderate catch-all ideology.

Although Vox failed to achieve representation in its early years, the party strategy aimed to find a niche in the more conservative electorate. Accordingly it established formal relationships with other radical right forces in Europe and the US<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly, shortly after the party finally made its electoral breakthrough in the December 2018 Andalusia regional elections, some right-wing media

<sup>2</sup> "Ex miembros del PP buscan una alianza ultra con Le Pen y Trump", *Público*, 23-1-2017. Link: <https://www.publico.es/politica/ex-miembros-del-pp-buscan.html>

pundits welcomed Vox as an opportunity to replace the PP with a new genuinely conservative force. Indeed, Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo—a young influential national MP for the PP that had renounced to run again in 2015 due to discrepancies with Rajoy's politics—predicted that Vox would inexorably "bury the PP" (Álvarez de Toledo, 2019).

Actually, since Rajoy's cabinet resignation in June 2018 as a consequence of parliamentary vote of no confidence, Vox became more attractive for right-wing party activists. Between June 2018 and November 2019, Vox' paying-fee grassroots expanded from 6.668 to 53.985 members, according party official data. This huge increase of party members paralleled Vox's electoral and institutional evolution in the several elections that took place in 2019. It became the third party in the national parliament, the fifth Spanish force in the European Parliament, and a necessary group for obtaining parliamentary majority in several regions and municipalities. Although this very fast electoral expansion was rooted in a large coalition of centrist and right-wing voters, Vox was particularly successful in challenging the PP's longtime dominance among the radical right electorate, achieving 37 percent of the voters which self-identified between positions 8 and 10 in the left-right axis (November 2019 election).

While Vox (and Ciudadanos) successfully wore out the PP's electoral and party hegemony on the Spanish right, the political fragmentation process also experienced relevant obstacles that allowed the PP to avoid being bypassed by the newcomers. On the one hand, the electoral system favored PP's predominance, particularly in the rural constituencies. Hence, in April 2019 the sum of the three parties left 1,001,105 small districts votes without representation, while in November 2019 this amount increased up to 1,279,197 votes being lost. These *lost* votes were the sum of votes obtained in those districts where the three parties could not achieve at least one representative in April 2019 (Vox: 689,066; Ciudadanos: 164,693; PP: 147,346) and in November 2019 (Ciudadanos: 765,046; Vox: 341,259; PP: 172,892). In contrast, PSOE left only 15,449 unrepresented votes in November 2019 while Podemos' losses amounted to 532,483 (April) and 465,266 (November)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: "La anomalía de los votos perdidos que explican la victoria de la izquierda", *eldiario.es*, 11-11-2019.

## The role of polarization

In the previous section, we showed how Vox contributed to the electoral fragmentation of the Spanish right. But how was this breakthrough finally possible? In this section, we address the relevance of polarization and party centrifugal competition. As mentioned in the theoretical section, scholars have tended to disagree regarding the strong relationship between radical right parties and the increase of polarization. From a voter's perspective, centrifugal strategies are usually seen as the result of ideological changes in the electoral demand, while scholars adopting an agency approach argue that, in other cases, the breakthrough of extreme parties with radical platforms may be the source of electoral polarization instead (Bischof & Wagner, 2019; Castanho Silva, 2018; Mudde, 2013).

In the case of Vox, polarization played a fundamental role. As shown in Figure 2, Vox emerged in a highly polarized party system in which—however—voters keep their ideological instances quite stable. This evidence stresses the role of party strategies in producing this polarization. By 2018 right-wing political competition featured two different trends: firstly, the PP's reputation crisis, produced by internal corruption problems, and Rajoy's government controversial management of the territorial crisis in Catalonia; secondly, Ciudadanos' strategy to replace the PP's right-wing electorate predominance. In this context, Rajoy's government fall in June 2018, following the vote of no-confidence proposed by the left in the national parliament, opened the floor for a deep dissatisfaction among many conservative voters as a consequence of the new PSOE government, which was supported by the radical left and Catalan secessionist groups. This *black swan* produced a political earthquake on the center and right, which finally paved the way for Vox. Between May and July Ciudadanos lost many of the support it had gained in previous months, and the voting intention for both Ciudadanos and PP decreased by 6 points approximately, while the PSOE started its ascension in the opinion polls, becoming the party with better prospects after a decade.

The main beneficiary of this situation was Vox, an extra-parliamentary party that more conspicuously represented the toughest position regarding the Catalan crisis and the center-periphery cleavage in general. Once Ciudadanos' strategy proved to be unsuccessful in preventing the Left's come back to power, Vox became the representative of those right-wing voters that developed a feeling of *diffuse unease*, a set of negative political attitudes regarding the political context, including criticism against the new government, against politicians and political parties in general, against regional nationalisms, and against the Catalan secessionists.

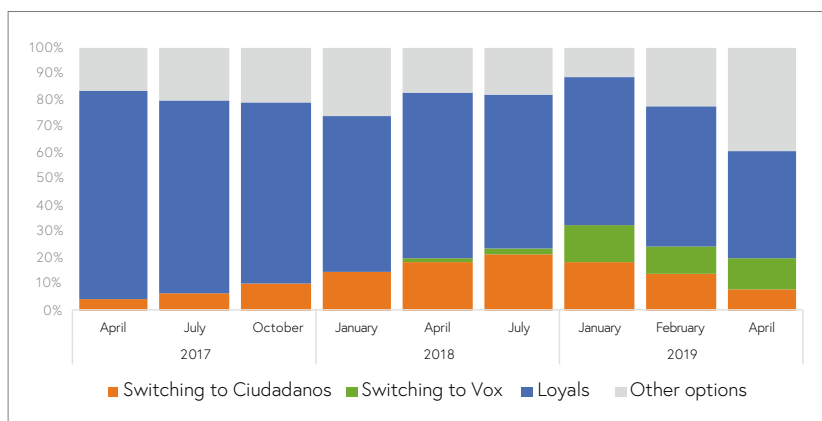
This political discontent was the distinctive feature of the electorate switching to Vox by the end of 2018, in contrast with PP and Ciudadanos' loyal voters—more worried about issues such as the economy, or unemployment. Driven by this wave of dissatisfaction, Vox made its breakthrough in the December 2018 Andalusian regional. Thereafter, its electoral chances started to grow up steadily until the party gained access to the national parliament in April 2019, becoming the third parliamentary group in November.

During this time, Vox implemented a centrifugal strategy seeking to attract voters from across the ideological spectrum that could be politically dissatisfied with the existing electoral supply. Vox's platform mostly focused on expressing intolerance regarding Muslim immigration; defending traditional values in opposition to gender political correctness' policies—which were a priority for the new PSOE government—; and in praising Spanish nationalism with nostalgic winks to the authoritarian past, proposing the overall suppression of decentralization (Acha, 2021; Barrio, 2019; Ferreira, 2019; Garrido & Mora, 2020; Montabes & Cazorla, 2020). Still, the party's most successful message was its claims for strong repression of the Catalan independence movement, for instance, calling repeatedly the government to imprison Catalan authorities and party leaders, to ban parties defending secession, and to take direct rule over the regional institutions. However, the low concern about immigration and the support to gender equality in the left-wing electorate substantively limited Vox's potential beyond right-wing groups leaving Ciudadanos and PP. Hence, Vox often criticized conservative leaders of the 'cowardly Righty' for being too moderate in their opposition role against the Left's policies.

Vox' centrifugal strategy fostered polarization, at least at the party level, but only in certain issues. Although Vox often seemed unable to deliver more specific measures and remained at the level of generic messages, the party strategy was indeed successful in forcing the PP and, to a lesser extent, Ciudadanos to replicate their positions regarding national identity and the Catalan situation. While both PP and Ciudadanos usually disregarded the more controversial discourses on gender or immigration, they competed narrowly in their criticism of Sánchez's government moderate position on Catalonia—which opted for dialogue with the independence movement. For instance, current PP leader Pablo Casado adopted a disrespectful attitude against the prime minister during the electoral campaign, calling him a 'traitor', 'mediocre', 'incompetent' or 'the greatest treacherous in the Spanish democratic history'. Significantly, PP and—with more difficulties—Ciudadanos never ruled out Vox as a potential political partner in minority governments, a situation that finally took place in several regions and municipalities. On the contrary, PP's

leaders adopted a friendly approach towards Vox, aiming to prevent their own voters' switching towards the extreme force. This predisposition by PP and Ciudadanos to accept Vox' support in the institutional arena produced increasing internal criticism among party leaders in favor of a more pragmatic, centrist approach. A year after Vox' entry, right-wing voters gave more saliency to political discontentment issues, in contrast to the negative evolution of immigration or corruption issues. Interestingly, the PP's replication strategy was successful in containing electoral loses. But that was not the case for Ciudadanos, since more than half of their voters in April did not maintain their support in November, switching instead to PP (15 percent), Vox (9 percent), abstention (11 percent) or other options (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Swing vote in the opinion polls: voting intention in the next general election for former PP voters in 2016**



Source: CIS Data bank. The wording of the question is: "Which party would you vote for if there were general elections tomorrow?" Data shows the proportion among former voters in the previous general election (2016).

## Who votes for Vox

In this context of party system change, the main explanation for Spanish mainstream right's decline seems to be political rather than economical, and not necessarily related to new issues like the EU or immigration. Aiming to have a more robust approach to the electoral impact produced by Vox, we have conducted a multinomial regression model analyzing the drivers behind support for the radical right. This model controls for the usual socioeconomic drivers and also for ideological

identity, voters' perceptions of the political and economic situation, immigration and authoritarian values, according to the alternative explanations given by the literature. Since concerns regarding Catalan secessionism and PSOE's government were key issues for party strategy, they were also included in each model. The analysis employed data from the CIS 2019 post electoral surveys.

The empirical analysis delivers four main outcomes. Firstly, electoral support for Vox is significantly related to the effects stemming from their direct opponents' centrifugal strategies. There is a positive effect of polarization—measured in terms of ideological distance between voters and party—on those voting for Vox, i.e. right-wing voters feeling distanced from parties tend to vote for the most radical option. Conversely, there is a negative effect on polarization, measured as the perceived ideological distances among parties. Hence, the lower the perceived level of party polarization the higher the support for Vox and the lower the chances of voting for Cs and PP. In this respect, the overlapping centrifugal strategies implemented by PP and Ciudadanos regarding national identity eliminated perceived party differences between moderate and radical forces. In a context of political frustration, this finally benefitted Vox's electoral chances.

In the second place, the models analyzing right-wing voters' determinants in the April 2019 general election seem to confirm the argument which holds that political motivations are behind Spanish mainstream right's decline. Hence, individuals mainly concerned about Catalan independence mostly chose new parties, since they showed 4.7 times higher chances of voting for Vox as opposed to other options. This impact remains unalterably high in November 2019 for Vox, while it becomes statistically insignificant for Ciudadanos, which suggests that those who were more mobilized by this issue moved to Vox along 2019. Similarly, political discontent produced by the new left wing government and both PP's and Ciudadanos' inability to keep the situation under control also proved relevant in benefitting Vox. Indeed, being critical about the political situation increased the odds of voting for Vox by 80 percent, while Ciudadanos' chances decrease by 28 percent. It also increased the likelihood of former PP voters switching to Vox. More interestingly, support for Vox seems particularly driven by conservative voters' rejection of the new prime minister.

Thirdly, economic motivations did not play a direct role in Vox' emergence. Social features such as being at risk of poverty or having low-paid positions do not successfully predict voting for the radical right. Actually, being worried about unemployment and the economic situation decreased by 40 percent the odds of voting Vox. Instead, PP's voters were positively more sensitive to economic problems

in both April and November compared to Vox's supporters. In this respect, since late 2019 Vox became the main representative of right-wing voters who cared more about the political turbulences rather than the economic perceptions.

Finally, there is one relevant aspect in which the Spanish case is in line with the literature: the effect of populist or illiberal values. Accordingly, concern about immigration is a relevant predictor for voting for Vox, following the same pattern detected by previous studies (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Vampa, 2020). Furthermore, preference for authoritarian regimes almost doubles the chances of voting for Vox, while it produces the opposite effect for Ciudadanos and PP. However, we should be careful when interpreting the meaning behind these features. As we pointed out in previous sections, there is no evidence of a cultural backlash among Spaniards that could open a window of opportunity for radical right forces. In December 2019, only 5.7 percent of individuals expressed some preference for authoritarian regimes, and around one third of them voted for Vox. Actually, they represented 21 percent of Vox's total votes, while 70.4 percent defended democracy as their preferred regime. As for immigration, only 10 percent of Spaniards perceived it as a main issue<sup>4</sup>, and 22 percent of them voted for Vox, comprising 30 percent of all its voters (as seen in Table 3). In sum, while an important portion of those expressing authoritarian values and concern about immigration have decided to vote Vox because of its nativist discourse, the majority of Vox' voters do not share those opinions regarding that issue.

These numbers suggest that immigration and authoritarian values provide unsatisfactory explanations for Vox's breakthrough. Instead, these political attitudes may have been useful political factors in anchoring party support *once it already made its parliamentary breakthrough*. In this respect, among individuals concerned with immigration, keeping other factors under control, odds for voting for Vox and PP were the same in November 2019. Preference for authoritarian regimes produced exactly the same output. This points out the important dilemma right-wing parties face when competing around this issue, since it may help to steal electoral support of a small minority on the right, but it may also raise barriers for future expansion coming from attraction of other conservative voters. This is the reason why PP has avoided focusing party competition on this issue so far.

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<sup>4</sup> Certainly, in the months leading up to Vox's regional breakthrough, the immigration crisis had gained momentum after Sánchez' new government's decision to host refugees rescued by the Aquarius humanitarian vessel in June 2018. Hence, between June and September concern about immigration grew from 3.5 to 15.6 percent (according to CIS Barometers). Figures have remained stable ever since, fluctuating around 10 percent. However, this numbers are far from previous decade levels, when immigration was perceived as a problem for more than 30 percent of the population between 2005 and 2008.

## Vox's electoral development

As we have seen in the previous section, the 2019 electoral cycle was a success for Vox, and its analysis proved helpful in gaining insights about the conditions that took place for their parliamentary breakthrough to take place. Vox particularly benefited from the perceived polarization produced by PP and Ciudadano's centrifugal competition, in a context in which victory for the right was perceived by conservative voters as highly unlikely. This situation left two open questions: how long could the window of opportunity remain open for Vox? How could an improvement in the electoral prospects of its main competitor—the PP—affect the party? The following months' political evolution provided the right context in which to attempt answering these questions.

**Table 2. Electoral support for PP, Ciudadanos and Vox in regional elections since 2020**

	Galicia July 2020	Basque Country July 2020	Catalonia February 2021	Madrid May 2021
<b>PP</b>				
%	47.9	6.8	3.9	44.8
Seats	42	6	3	65
Change % votes	+0.4	-5.4	-0.4	+22.5
<b>Ciudadanos</b>				
%	0.8	*	5.6	3.6
Seats	0		6	0
Change % votes	-2.6		-19.8	-15.9
<b>Vox</b>				
%	2.0	1.9	7.7	9.1
Seats	0	1	11	13
Change % votes	+2.0	+1.9	+7.7	+0.2
<b>Size of the chamber</b>				
	75	75	135	136

Source: Own elaboration from official data. "Change % votes" shows the difference compared to the previous regional election. (\*) In the Basque country, Ciudadanos run in coalition with the PP.

On the one hand, the health crisis produced by the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to cause a legitimacy crisis for political parties having to manage it. Since the main political parties—and Vox rivals—managed the crisis at either state or regional level, a backlash or anti-incumbent vote could become an opportunity for Vox to

capitalize on anti-establishment protests. Accordingly, Vox was the only national party that rejected all subsequent votes authorizing the central government extending the state of alarm since the initial spring 2020 one, which the party had supported. In addition, during the whole pandemic crisis Vox turned towards a very harsh discourse based around the illegitimate government theme—regardless of the parliamentary majority backing it. As a result of that strategy, Vox registered a vote of no-confidence against Pedro Sánchez' government, which failed after no other party supported it. However, despite the party's tough position, its electoral support remained stable throughout 2020 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Voting intention for Vox (2018-2021)**



Source: CIS electoral polls.

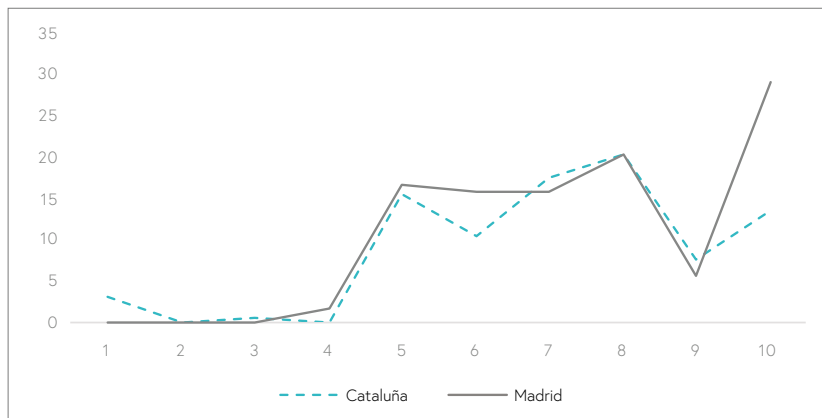
On the other hand, the holding of four regional elections between 2020 and 2021 became an opportunity for the party to expand its presence in the regional arena. Although these elections were held in extraordinary contexts—i.e. conditioned by health measures—, they can be taken as tests in order to determine whether Vox could continue benefitting from the conditions that favored its breakthrough in 2019. Specifically, regarding whether access to institutions would boost their options, or whether their prospects would continue to depend on the degree of polarization and the PP's own electoral prospects.

Held shortly after the first wave of COVID-19, the July 2020 elections in Galicia and the Basque Country were marked by a low polarization level and by the PP's electoral prospects varying greatly in each region: predominant party in Galicia; very weak one in the Basque Country. This situation conditioned Vox's results. In Galicia, the PP kept its absolute majority while Vox could not even obtain parliamentary representation. In the Basque Country, the PP's poor expectations allowed Vox's breakthrough into the parliamentary chamber with one seat, although the sum of both parties added to less representation than the PP had obtained in the previous elections.

Interestingly enough, the 2021 elections in Catalonia and Madrid, held at a less critical stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, offered a much more polarized political context and, again, with very different prospects for the PP in each region. As could be expected, Vox obtained better results where the PP was weak and the political situation was highly polarized. In Catalonia, Vox obtained parliamentary representation and became the parliaments fourth party, well above the PP. In contrast, in Madrid's high polarization context, the PP obtained much better results than it had in the previous 2019 elections, thus blocking Vox's options of achieving significantly better results. In fact, Madrid's regional elections were the first sign of stagnation in Vox's successful electoral progression up to that point.

This divergent evolution also reflected the extent to which Vox could attract former Ciudadanos voters (thus expanding its electoral transversality): while the majority of conservative voters who had supported Ciudadanos in Catalonia in the previous elections opted for Vox rather than the PP, in Madrid the former had much less capacity to absorb the center electorate. As a consequence, Vox obtained a higher proportion of far-right voters in Madrid, while in Catalonia its median voter was more moderate (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Distribution of Vox voters across the left-right dimension (1-10)



Source: CIS electoral polls. Proportion of NA is not included in the Figure.

## Future perspectives

The chapter has tried to underline the importance of party competition in order to understand Vox's breakthrough and its further evolution. The problems faced by the PP during its last years in office marked by the Catalan crisis and important party corruption affaires, eroded its political legitimacy and led to its electoral decline. This situation fueled centrifugal competition between PP and Ciudadanos in a struggle for predominance within the right-wing electorate. As a result, this polarizing dynamics opened a window of opportunity for Vox. After the change of parliamentary majority and the new PSOE government being formed, Vox gained prominence because of its credibility against the Catalan independence issue, thus channeling the rage of many voters that were disappointed with the PP and Ciudadanos' inability to keep the radical left and the Catalan nationalist parties away from the new majority.

Our analysis has shown three party system dimensions related to Vox's parliamentary breakthrough: the electoral coordination failure in the right, the role of polarization as a driver of party switch towards a more radical vote, and the resulting electoral realignment. The analysis has integrated previous explanations for the rise of extremist and challenger parties, particularly those referring to the importance of authoritarian values, in order to test their political relevance in the Spanish context.

In the end, the main explanation for the radical right's breakthrough in Spain comes from Vox's legitimation deriving from centrifugal strategies: party polarization—but not voters' polarization—fostered radical vote switching, which in turn produced more ideological polarization in the party system.

The importance of party polarization in the Spanish political realignment delivers an interesting case to observe whether it will produce some of usual consequences the literature has registered regarding the political system and public opinion (Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendusky, Malhotra, & Westwood, 2019; Lupu, 2015; Mason, 2018). However, it also shows the limits to such effects. After all, electoral fragmentation did not prevent parties from setting electoral, parliamentary or cabinet coalitions (at the regional or local level), following a learning-by-doing process. Actually, it seems that polarization has primarily blocked traditional inter-block agreements made by the two mainstream forces—PSOE and PP—, as well as traditional relationship between the Spanish and the Catalan nationalist rightwing major forces. This was the source for deadlock in the government formation process that finally ended up in two repeated elections in 2016 and 2019. It also eroded the extent for consensual agreements in the governance of the pandemic. It is still to be seen to what extent may the division of the right and its centrifugal competition dynamics open the door to previously unseen policy debates, questioning consensus on immigration, the EU or gender equality. As we have mentioned in the empirical section, while some of these issues may feed more centrifugal competition, the lack of change in the citizenship's opinions towards more radical positions is a powerful limitation for the radical right messages.

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# Negation as enunciative position: Spanish radical right's discourse in the social network context<sup>1</sup>

**Beatriz Gallardo Paúls**

## Approach: four tweets, one election

It is already commonplace to assume that regarding 21st century politics, especially if we look at its discursive substrate, social networks, and particularly Twitter, have become a relevant channel for ideological transmission—with Facebook being more important if we narrow our analyses down to the relationship between social networks and the media. (Trottier & Fuchs 2015; Engesser *et al.* 2017; Enguix 2019; López-López & Oñate 2019).

This work will analyse political party Vox's most used discursive strategies on Twitter. As a starting point, we propose a comparison (Figure 1) of four tweets reacting to the results of the European Parliament elections held in May 2019:

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Figure 1. Twitter accounts on the night of May 26th after vote counting for the European elections took place.



As shown, Marine Le Pen's official account's (@MLP\_officiel) tweet talks about "the French" and "#ThePeoplesVictory", as well as candidate Jordan Bardella, whom she praises. In the second case, while the tweet is not a reaction to the elections' results, since it is the pinned tweet posted on the Brexit Party account (@brexitparty\_uk) during the last days of the campaign, it remained pinned even after the first triumphant statements by Nigel Farage; highlights include the "Thank you" message and implicit mention to that surveys are not actual reality. The third case is Lega Nord's leader Matteo Salvini's (@matteosalvinimi) tweet, in a photo

that conveys informality and emotion, with a simple handwritten message with a text that echoes the image: "One simple word: Thank you, Italy ". Finally, if we observe political party Vox's message, a striking difference with the other three can be easily pinpointed: it is neither a message of gratitude to its electorate nor a celebration of the political "we", but a message that refers to a different discursive position: "We have already passed". This message replaces the clearly positive expressiveness in the other three parties' messages with a tone evoking negative expressiveness, one that seems closer to imprecation.

In order to describe this difference, we can firstly turn to the meanings introduced by the use of the adverb "already". This element works as a presuppositional trigger that performs a double function:

- On the one hand it activates intertextuality, since the well-known slogan "They shall not pass"—the republican slogan in the face of Madrid's siege by Franco's forces—is introduced into the discourse, in turn conveying an idea of temporal flow and the culmination of a long historical process, which links these 2019 elections with the 1930s.
- On the other hand it establishes a dialogue, since it is a response to "They shall not pass". This answer denies the republican slogan and is based on interactive discrepancy.

A second important element is the colloquialism of the participle "*pasa'o*", typical of informal conversational situations, which seems to appeal to street-level speech but also has cocky and boastful speech connotations. Thus, a defiant discursive tone is conveyed: One of a certain arrogance which is not directed at the party's "us" or its voters, but at a "them", made up of those who could currently align with the slogan "They shall not pass".

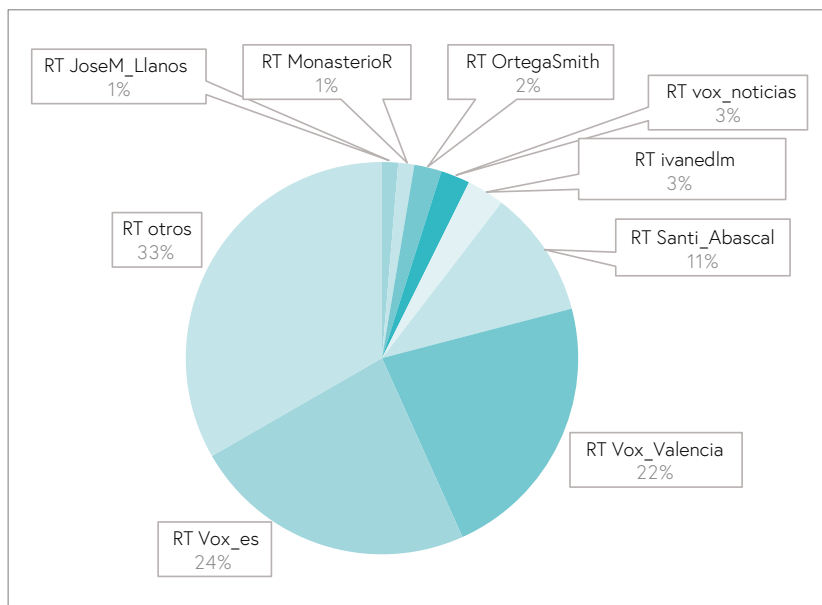
## Theoretical and methodological tenets

In the following paragraphs we analyse Vox's speech using Vox Valencia's Twitter account's (@vox\_valencia) messages between January 4 and May 5 2019 as the main corpus. This period includes the significant events such as the feminist marches that took place in March as well as both Valencian general and regional elections that took place on April 28 . The sample was obtained through TwDocs, a

program which provides the last 3,200 messages of each selected profile—in this case we specifically obtained 3,157. Our aim is to identify the generic use of the discursive strategies used in these messages which, contrary to what the example mentioned above seems to suggest, are not always far removed from the rest of the European radical right parties.

A global view of the sample's tweets shows Vox's Valencian account's minimal specificity as a first basic conclusion. As shown in Figure 2, 73.7% of the published messages are other people's accounts retweets. The retweeted messages are their own messages (22%), those of the party's general account (@vox\_es), and those of its main national leaders: Abascal, Espinosa de los Monteros, Ortega Smith and Monasterio; with regional leader José M. Llanos barely obtaining 1% of these *remediation* messages (Alcántara 2019).

Figure 2. @vox\_valencia account's retweets.

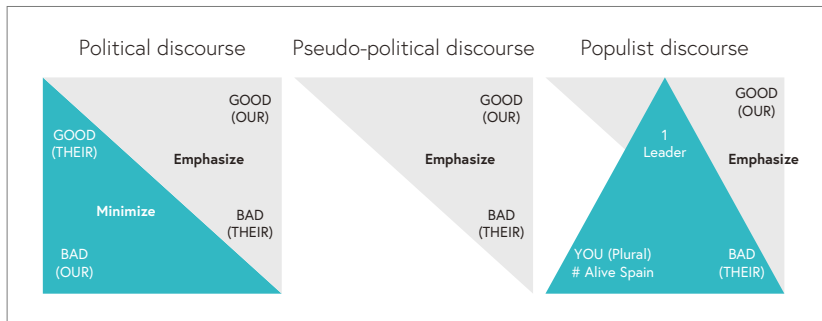


Presently most parties ascribed by political theory to the radical right are linguistically characterized by the use of populist discourse (Charaudeau 2005,

2009). In order to characterize this rhetorical mode our starting point will be the well-known idea that all political discourse implies the construction of a "we-us" versus a "they-them"—an idea that the analysis of modern discourse summarizes in the *ideological square* described by Van Dijk (2004). Figure 3 shows three descriptive models that correspond to three different discursive situations, whose appearance does not necessarily occur in linear order of appearance:

1. The general political discourse builds an ideological square that emphasizes the positive aspects in the "us" and the negative ones in the "them", while minimizing their opposites: "our" bad and "their" good. The way in which this difference is managed is, in theory, proportionate, rational, and claims to be objective. This discourse is compatible with the unfolding of the three Aristotelian discursive spheres: *ethos* (evidence derived from the "moral character of the speaker"), *logos* (evidence based on "discourse itself") and *pathos* (evidence emanating from of the "listener's disposition").
2. In pseudo-political discourse, especially boosted by social networks (Gallardo & Enguix 2016), the ideological square is replaced by an *axiological square* which only highlights—hyperbolically (Gallardo 2018)—its own positive aspects and the others' negative ones. Difference is thus loaded with both identity and exclusive values, hence imposing subjective and emotional aspects—*ethos* and *pathos*.
3. Populist discourse introduces a discursive triangle by splitting the "we", on the one hand, into "I (the leader)", and on the other, into "you (the people, living Spain, etc.)". This leader's protagonism is thus ambivalent, since it is constructed equally in opposition to the second and third person, meaning that the resulting speech has to emphasize both the rejection of others and his or her follower's cohesion.

Figure 3. Three structural models of political discourse.



From this standpoint, we hold that the construction of the "we/the good"—typical of populist discourse— lies on the distinction of a charismatic leader and a "you/the people", which in Vox's case is lexicalized through hashtags such as #ThePartOfSpainThatGetsUpEarly [#LaEspañaQueMadruga], #LivingSpain [# LaEspañaViva], etc. The leader's figure (as well as his or her speech) as both a victim and a saviour becomes essential as an articulating axis for a divided society:

- Ex.1 Tweet by @vox\_esp's on 01/11/2019, 9:41AM.  
@Santi\_ABASCAL at @EspejoPublico  
"I'm not a creature of the system but of my own convictions"  
#CaféAbascal  
[Interview screenshot]
- Ex.2 Tweet by @libertaddigital on 02/05/19, 10:56AM.  
Abascal accuses Sánchez of "betraying Spain and the Constitution"  
[Interview video]
- Ex.3 Article by @Santi\_ABASCAL in @larazon\_es  
"In short, we must prevent misgovernment from forcing the Crown (once again) to warn regarding the limits of political incompetence."  
[Link to article]

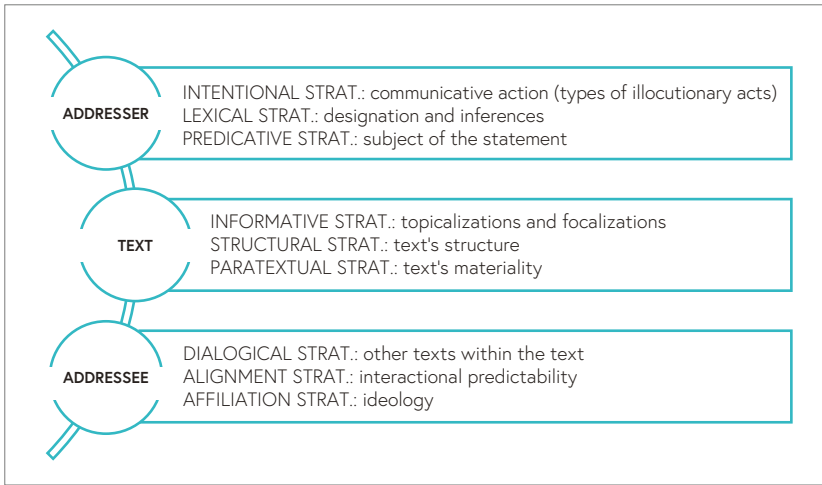
The triangle's "they", as we shall see, is also polyhedral since it points towards a catch-all discursive strategy: the media—although only some (Oleaque 2019)—, other parties, Spain's enemies, liberals, communists, separatists, the fearful, feminism, immigrants... The tweet in Ex. 4 sums up this identification of the enemy well:

- Ex.4 Tweet by @Santi\_ABASCAL on 03/19/2019, 1:46PM.

NOTICE for the MEDIA and PARTIES that are tracking our lists and scanning our candidates: You will not find a single enemy of Spain. Nor any ally of Spain's enemies. Neither will you find liberals, communists, separatists, or fearful.

Regarding our method for analysis, we use a cognitive linguistics model that identifies various strategies to determine the framing of texts. Figure 4 schematically presents the different strategic levels of the discursive framework, which we will review in the following sections:

Figure 4. Schematic summary of the analysis model.



## Framing enunciative strategies

*Framing's intentional strategy* corresponds to the communicative action carried out by texts. Using Searle's typology of illocutionary acts we can identify basic trends in tweets. Regarding the most prominent communicative intention, it is worth noting the predominance of a positive expressive illocutionary force that is used to create a discursive *pathos* (Charaudeau 2008).

Ex.5 Tweet by @vox\_es on 01/18/19, 1:59PM.

"Among the dead there will always be a living language to shout that Spain does not give up."

Spectacular @Santi\_ABASCAL yesterday in Zaragoza.

Long live Spain! [Spanish flag and "give the finger" emoji].

RT. You won't see this on television. [Video Abascal's rally].

In this construction of the "we", typical rhetorical elements of the fascist idiolects of the 20th century can be observed (De Santiago 1992; Pérez-Bowie 1988; Sesma 2006; Francesconi 2009), such as:

- Triumphalism, rhetoricism, emotionality.
- Creation of a "we" built around moral and sentimental values alien to general politics:
  - Compassion (selective: under age victims in current events, Christian victims in terrorist attacks).
  - Pride (athletes, security forces, the military abroad...).
  - Solidarity (diverse groups: hunters, bullfighting in rural areas...).
  - Essentialist patriotic identification (praise of traditions: fallas festivals, religious processions...).
- Peculiarity rhetoric: appropriation strategy regarding groups neglected by the classic progressive rhetorics on peculiarity (Gallardo 2018).
- Victimization: victim/perpetrator rhetorical investment. The binary exclusionary dynamic is updated by presenting themselves in their own messages as victims of the political or media system.

A collective's defence is always carried out through attacking another collective and through confrontation. See the following examples:

Ex.6 Tweet by @VOX\_Valencia on 03/14/19, 9:18PM.

May the two little ones rest in peace. My prayers and my condolences. Violence can only be reduced through education and values, and it sees no sex or age. Domestic violence is the most terrible. @vox\_es is certain of that.

[Link to a news item by lasprovincias.es about the finding of the bodies of two murdered children]

Ex.7 Tweet by @VOX\_Valencia on 02/28/19, 0:27AM.

VOX supports hunting for economic and environmental reasons and in order to defend the rural world. We've had enough with arrogant urbanites telling countryside people how they ought to live. Stopping hunting in Castilla y León is nonsense.

[Link to a news item by diariodeleon.es about the suspension of hunting by the Spanish Supreme Court]

Ex.8 Tweet by @VOX\_Valencia on 02/24/19, 1:49PM.

"It isn't easy to campaign when many media change and manipulate our message" @JoseMa\_Llanos at @COPEValencia #ForSpain

[Photo of the interview]

Alternatively, the construction of the "they" is characterized by negative expressiveness. Mouffe (1994: 6) has described this situation from an identity reformulation of the we/them opposition:

the 'other', who up until now has been considered simply as different, starts to be perceived as someone who is rejecting 'my' identity and who is threatening 'my' existence. From that moment on, any form of us/them relationship – whether it be religious, ethnic, economic or other – becomes political.

Secondly, the remaining illocutionary possibilities also unfold with some clear trends. Thus, and with regard to representative illocutivity, certain type of messages that we may call *sobering tweets*, and that are not as frequent in other political parties' profiles, stand out (Gallardo, Oleaque & Enguix 2018). A large part of some leaders' profiles is comprised of long strings of tweets ("threads") in which a concrete, compact line of thought is exposed, explaining the party's position regarding flagship issues. A pedagogical, simplistic, explicit, and often sarcastic tone is used. In this regard Espinosa de los Monteros' account stands out. Following is a partial reproduction of one his threads, comprised of is a string of a total of twelve threaded messages as allowed by the platform. Note the lexical uses and the teasing/sobering tone:

Ex.9 Tweets by @ivanedlm on 01/05/2019, 3:54PM.

Warning: long thread ... but I think it won't disappoint.

Here it goes:

This week has revealed—and clearer than ever—the gap between progre elites and Spaniards' reality. It has been a very interesting experiment. Let's go ahead:

[Second tweet] In reply to @ivanedlm

Let's start with the context: after the results of the Andalusians [regional elections in Andalucía], Cs [Ciudadanos party] and PP [Popular Party] agreed for an "anti-Vox agreement" led by Cs. Let us remember that Cs, far from the desired sorpasso, only managed to be third ... which explains why they have been giving a histrionic show for a month.

[Third tweet] In reply to @ivanedlm  
First came that absurd thing where @JuanMarin\_Cs had to be the president. And Rivera's spoiled child challenge that "there was no reason to prevent it" Then, more spoiled children's whims: "I get angry with the PP if they sit down and negotiate with Vox". And lastly...

[Eleventh tweet] In reply to @ivanedlm  
For every hysteric who attacks Vox on TV, a calm interview with @Ortega\_Smith or @monasterioR or an article by @Santi\_ABASCAL putting things back in place. The truth prevails if you have conviction and courage. Cs previously defended the same, but backed down after criticism.

[Twelfth tweet] In reply to @ivanedlm  
And after all, dear friends, precisely this is what defines the progre gap, and it is also that which the progressives of all the parties do not understand, especially Cs "the weathercocks". @vox\_es does not change when the storm approaches: Vox is the storm!

The compromissory illocutivity obviously corresponds to the electoral promises, and the directive illocutivity to the publication of harangues that encourage voting, party affiliation, and patriotism:

Ex.10 Tweet by @Santi\_ABASCAL on 03/10/19, 9:16PM.

Once in office, VOX will declassify and make public PSOE [Socialist party]/PP's arrangements with Eta [terrorist group]. We want to know why Josu Ternera is free. Beyond dark negotiations, Justice must act. [Video showing PSOE leaders]

Ex.11 Tweet by @VOX\_valencia on 04/15/19, 3:25PM.

If you love Spain, if you want to strengthen your motherland, if you want to recover the freedoms that have been stolen from you, for the nation, for freedom, for Spain! #28A: VOTE FOR VOX  
#FearNothingOrNobody #ForSpain  
[Electoral campaign Vox video]

As part of this "voxisit idiolect", the choice of words—the lexical strategy—is absolutely essential, since designation mechanisms directly guide conceptualization. It uses a haughty lexicon, with solemnity connotations, rhetoricism, and pseudolyrism. The "idiomatic monumentality" characteristic of 1930s nationalisms,

meaning the "abuse of superlatives, pleonasms, tautologies, *epitheta ornantia*, etc." with a masking function (Pérez-Bowie 1988: 357) is updated. In addition, vulgar tones and slang is used, with transgressions of the Gricean principle in the way they activate inferences and identifications (Gallardo & Madrid 2020).

A particularly profitable and productive mechanism is the creation of lexicalizations with the function of conceptual "packaging": "progressive dictatorship" [*dictadura progre*], "plasterboard Spain" [*la España del pladur*], "living Spain" [*la España viva*], "the orange weathercock" [*la veleta naranja*, meaning Cs], "the cowardly righty" [*la derechita cobarde*]. In doing so they quickly coin labels that, almost like slang, establish group complicity. These are nods of recognition close to the implicit understandings:

Ex.12 Tweet by @VOX\_valencia on 02/10/19, 6:18PM.

The squatter's government, the far left, the separatists and "la Sexta" [center-left Spanish TV channel] will claim that this morning there were only 45,000 people in Colón [square]. The reality is that not one single soul more could fit in the square or in the surrounding streets.  
#SánchezLeave10F

These lexical uses adjust to negative expressiveness and therefore are more frequently used in the construction of the discursive "they". Furthermore, the explicit use of nonsense and disparaging terms is made, often with echoes of the past: "*the Frenchman*" or "*little Napoleon*" [Napoleoncito], to refer to Emmanuel Macron or Manuel Valls; "The squatter" to refer to Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. Any hint of correction is disregarded as political correctness, and therefore incorrectness and the violation of minimal cooperative codes are exhibited; the rudeness becomes "true talk": "*femalism*", "*spit on the progres*", "*progre dictatorship*", "*feminazis*", "*gender totalitarianism*", "*supremacist feminism*", "*Torra's puppies*", and so on. A tweet by @vox\_noticias describes a speech by Ortega Smith in the European Parliament as "*shame-free, courageous, no sign of half-baked measures or political language*".

These lexicalization mechanisms, as is the case with insults and hate speech in general, imply a means to avoid dialogue and to establish a monological discourse, excluding and lacking alternatives, which eliminates any real possibility of argumentative replication or communication (Butler 1997). At the time of writing, for example, every time the press asks spokesperson Espinosa de los Monteros for explanations about corruption cases reported against him by newspaper *El País*, he systematically answers by speaking of "*PRISA group's inventions*", with a victimizing

counterattack that not only avoids all possible discursive justifying lines on his part, but also manages to avoid the simple denomination (of the facts of which he is accused of and of who is accusing him). Consequently, much of the transmitted meaning is entrusted to the unsaid (Gallardo & Madrid 2020).

Among these uses of implicit meaning *trap inferences* stand out. These entail a concealment mechanism that consists of placing falsehoods in the non-explicit scope, thus making their deactivation difficult:

Ex. 13 Tweet by @VOX\_Valencia on 02/06/19, 6:48PM.

@VOX\_Valencia's regional president @JoseMa\_Llanos  
"It is inconceivable that in Valencia keep being taught  
that we're Catalanian".  
#LivingSpain  
[Link to news item by valenciaextra.com]

Ex. 14 Tweet by @vox\_es on 04/04/19, 2:05PM.

We will continue saying that there are Islamists who want to colonize Europe and that they are an enemy to fight. They will have to put all VOX leaders in jail, since we will continue demanding the State to control those who want to impose burqa on Spanish women.  
[Video of Abascal's interview].

Finally, the distribution of roles in political action—the *framing's predicative strategy*— perpetuates the binary situation "we/others" that we have been describing, reaffirming the global axiological square. Notice how the following message does not name those "others", and dilutes them in an anonymous pronominalization that (again) has a masking function:

Ex. 15 Tweet by @vox\_valencia on 04/22/19, 10:31PM.

Some did not comply and now they have no credibility. Others are lukewarm and are undecided. We will be firm in restoring order and freedom in Catalonia. #ForSpain

Furthermore, the use of Sketch Engine software for extraction of the verbs that conjugate the "we" shows a really poor semanticity. No great political agency can be deduced from this, but only static discursive positions:

Figure 5. Word cloud from the full list of 1st person plural verb forms.



## Framing textual strategies

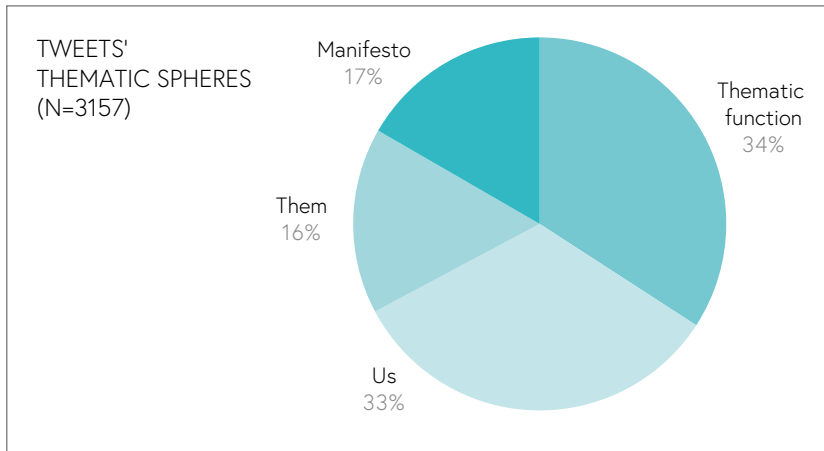
*Informative strategy* deals with the thematic management of texts and focuses on their content: what is talked about (and what is not). If we consider the messages' the basic functions, whether they are own tweets or retweets, we can differentiate four main thematic areas:

- Phatic function tweets: agenda and campaign teams, appearances in the media, attendance to events, creation of new delegations, calls for demonstrations...
- Configuration of the "we": messages contributing to exalting values and feeding back the "living Spain", messages of re-interpretation of their premises (mainly Iván Espinosa de los Monteros), of vindication of their role in Andalusia. Development of peculiarity rhetoric (bullfighting, security forces, hunting, prison officials, falleros, popular festivals, ETA terrorism's victims, weapon bearers, taxi drivers ...). Our symbols. Our leader. We victims.
- Configuration of the "them": attack on other leaders and parties, various groups.

- Electoral manifesto presentation: messages that refer to the specific policies defended by the party on multiple issues, although with special emphasis on those related to feminism and immigration.

Figure 6 shows how tweets are distributed according to these key subject areas:

**Figure 6. Thematic predominance in tweets: only 17% of them refer to the party manifesto.**



As we have already confirmed in previous works—and despite appearances—what gets talked about on Twitter is basically issues that are peripheral to real political action. In Vox's specific case, it especially gravitates towards mythifiable material and topics that can be easily channelled into stereotypes; the flag, language, nation, bullfighting, hunting, tradition... they act almost like McGuffin in thrillers, they are an excuse that serves as support for the introduction of the actually important topics and community building. These elements establish a very ambiguous interpretive framework, but one that functions as a compact package with evocation of the past: An idealized and monolithic past that evokes both an *obligation to be* and an *obligation to feel* (Horchschild 2016). Some of these fetish themes are:

- Spain as a nation whose sovereignty is threatened from multiple fronts that demand a response: the Catalan independence process, European directives, social movements, immigration.

Ex.16 Tweet by @vox\_esp on 03/07/19, 8:03PM.

Ortega\_Smith in Brussels stood for what millions of Spaniards think. Soon we will have MEPs who will defend our identity and sovereignty in the European Parliament against separatists, liberals, globalist bureaucrats and feminist supremacists.

[Video by El País with Ortega Smith's appearance in the European Parliament and subsequent statements]

— Global attack on feminism; denial of gender violence (vs. intra-family violence, domestic violence).

Ex.17 Tweet by @vox\_es on 03/08/19, 1:00PM.

This is how @monasterioR in SER stood up to the supremacist feminist discourse of socialist Carmen Calvo, who claims that men and women are unequal before the law.

[Link to video from Hora25 radio talk show on radio station SER].

— Immigration, highly narrative xenophobic discourse, focus on Islam.

Ex.18 Tweet by @vox\_esp on 04/04/19, 5:41PM.

Let no one doubt about this: VOX will continue to denounce and fight the Islamist invasion. We have to be vigilant and we have to expel anyone who poses a threat to the safety of Spaniards.

[Video showing compilation of images of Islamic fundamentalists attacks]

— Minorities selection: hunters, athletes, the military, bullfighters and farmers... The diversity discourse generated by the left since the 70s is speculatively reformulated and applied to new groups.

Ex.19 Tweet by @RFECaza on 03/05/19, 10:33AM.

@RFECaza meets @vox\_es to present ##HuntersAlsoVote

@Santi\_ABASCAL conveyed to @A\_LopezMaraver his "absolute commitment to #hunting and the federative institution", endorsing #HuntersAlsoVote #Spain

#TruthAboutHunting @voxnoticias\_es

[Photo of the meeting and link to video]



However, most of the time themes are not elaborated, they are only enunciated as emotional rather than argumentative anchors. The vagueness of their referential messages is worth highlighting, which is consistent with the lexical support provided by the inference and the connotation that we have already described. The notable exception is the aforementioned *sobering tweets*, which appear almost exclusively as retweets of Espinosa de los Monteros' profile.

The format adopted by the texts corresponds with the structural strategy of the discursive framing. The corpus tweets use narrative and argumentative superstructures in such a way that we can speak of certain predominant tendencies for the two fundamental types of textual schema. For example, we observe narrative predominance in victimization tweets:

Ex.22 Tweet by @ivanedlm on 04/22/19, 5:38PM.

Even when they attack us we end up winning. We stopped for lunch in the wonderful Navarra and some radicals have punctured our van's wheels. In turn we have met some fantastic @guardiacivil agents who have helped us change the tyre. #Thanks to all the guards!  
[Photos of the event]

Narrative messages are also optimal for prejudice consolidation, and above all, for mythologized stories at the service of hate speech to be reinforced and for the creation of negative stereotypes referring to women, immigrants, the media...

Ex.23 Tweet by @VOX\_Valencia on 03/28/19, 7:38PM.

@apunt\_media, the pancatalanist TV in @ximopuig and @monicaoltra's Valencian C. serving @QuimTorraíPla, closes its first broadcasting year with more than 48 million in losses!  
#Waste  
Point 35:  
At vox\_es we propose the closure of all regional televisions..  
[Link to lasprovincias.es]

On the other hand we find argumentative predominance in the sobering messages:

Ex.24 Tweet by @monasterioR on 03/07/19, 9:00PM.

We women do not want supremacist feminism to use us.  
That is why tomorrow we will work like any other day. Because we are already strong. We are already independent.

#DontSpeakOnMyBehalf [Photo of Monasterio showing a page on which the hashtag can be read]

It is relatively frequent for *common sense fallacies* to be used as a valid argument for a multitude of topics:

Ex.25 Tweet by @santi\_ABASCAL on 03/08/19, 9:26PM.

Let's leave behind this suicidal madness that aims to confront men and women. They will never win because their war is against common sense and nature.

[Video of the 8M marches].

Ex.26 Tweet by @vox\_esp on 03/20/19, 4:22PM.

We do not want firearms to be sold in supermarkets, we want an effective right to self defence that won't imply that if you defend yourself from a violent robber, you end up prosecuted for murder. It is pure common sense.

Ex.27 Tweet by @vox\_esp on 03/31/19, 0:31AM.

#LivingSpain overflows Barcelona:

We are extremely normal Spaniards.

We are radical advocators of obvious things.

We are extremists of common sense.

We are populists if that means loving our people.

RT if you are too [Video of Abascal at a rally]

Ex.28 Tweet by @vox\_esp on 02/03/19, 01:35AM.

@Santi\_ABASCAL in Toledo: "When common sense kicks in, no insult can stop it. We have come to set Spain in motion, led by common sense".

We also find cases of *exaltation fallacies*, by means of which the argument is emptied of referentiality and resolves itself into ravings: since the apparent representative illocutivity does not hold it is replaced by sentimental expressiveness.

Ex.29 Tweet by @VOX\_Valencia on 04/15/19, 11:25AM.

If you love Spain, if you want to strengthen your motherland, if you want to recover the freedoms that have been stolen from you, for the nation, for freedom, for Spain! #28A: VOTE FOR VOX

#FearNothingOrNobody #ForSpain

[Video showing images of socialist and independentist leaders]

The textual level closes with the *paratextual strategy* of the frame. The materiality of the texts has to do, basically, with the visual and sound aspects (especially prosody). Most of the tweeted messages are accompanied by photos and videos.

The political use of extraverbal elements in order to create an interpretive context is constantly and universally found. The following quote by Santamaría indicates how ministry rooms where high-level political meetings take place were traditionally accompanied by figurative images:

In a place like this it used to be common for the walls to be saturated with images of historical figures capable of touching the people's heart, subjects whose mere image coagulated national principles and heroic postulates, scenes of glorious battles, etc. (Santamaría 2018: 13).

However, the semantic load is undoubtedly greater in non-figurative symbols and emblems, the meaning of which requires a historical and cultural elaboration. In our data we stick to the importance of the visual elements that appear in tweets, the most important element of which are undoubtedly flags, although the national anthem also acquires great importance.

Ex.30 Tweet by @Ortega\_Smith on 04/06/19, 8:54AM.

The Nation standing invincible.

#Ibiza #LivingSpain

[Video of the start of a rally with a Spanish flag flying over the stage while the national anthem plays and the standing audience also waves many flags]

These symbols, which do not need explicit language/discourse, are advantageous in that they are essentializing, they appeal to identification, and above all they supply argumentation, which leads us to tropic relationships by leap, since each element exercises metonymy with respect to the others.

## Interactive strategies

Interactive strategies operate on three different levels, the most obvious of which is the quoted discourse (*interactive strategy*). In this regard, we have already pointed out the importance of quoted tweets which broadcast the message of national leaders on the @VOX\_Valencia account. The party's profile shows an echoic conception of the leaders' discourse, something that is absolutely common for Twitter profiles of all Spanish political parties (Gallardo, Oleaque and Enguix 2018).

The *alignment strategy* reveals that the speech disseminated on the Twitter account is to a very high extent a reactionary one, in the literal sense, meaning that it can be described as a discourse "against" something, obviously in line with confrontational—*clash* (Salmon 2018)—and discrepancy dynamics. However, as we have already pointed out, it is a unidirectional discrepancy which leaves no room to continue a refutative debate, and which blocks the way to any possible discursive continuation. This is a political stance represented in repeated phrases like "We won't allow for", "Vox won't tolerate", and the use of verbs begging with negative prefixes. The following tweet perfectly sums up this "'no' enunciation":

Ex.31 Tweet by @VOX\_Valencia on 01/05/19,  
#2019VoxYear:  
Suppression of Autonomies  
Illegalization of separatist parties  
Drastic tax cut  
End of subsidies to parties, unions, employers ...  
Defence of our borders  
Repeal of the Historical Memory Law  
Spain first  
[Link to [lasprovincias.es](https://lasprovincias.es)]

Therefore, we can infer that interaction and dialogue—elements which lie in this discursive level's foundations—are actually minimal. As a pragmatic category negation always acts as a presuppositional trigger that introduces the opposite affirmative voice into discourse. From this standpoint, it can be argued that the message constructed by Vox Valencia's Twitter profile is essentially a discourse based on denial and blocking any subsequent intervention, which in terms of interactive orientation can only be described as a kind of long reactive shift which, at the same time, is monological.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the messages disseminated by Vox through social networks by means of a cognitive analysis model, based on the identification of the different discursive strategies, allows us to identify, at the enunciative level, the predominance of an expressive illocutionary force, of a markedly negative character in the construction of the "them" (insults, imprecations) and of a positive nature in the construction of the "we" (exaltation, sophistry, rhetoricism, victimhood).

At the lexical level this fundamentally expressive intentionality, placed at the service of discursive *pathos*, relies on mechanisms such as the use of inference, changes in register (especially dysphemisms), and the creation of lexicalizations, which in all cases serve a masking and concealment function. This concealment points to another fundamental feature revealed by the analysis of the predicative strategy: the actantiality of the "we" is virtually non-existing. Hence both the emotionality and the rhetoric of confrontation can be interpreted as substitutes for a truly political discourse centred on argumentation for political proposals.

At the textual level this basic enunciative position is completed with the abuse of narrative structures (in the construction of the "they" and in victimization) and paratextual elements (flags, hymns, uniforms), as well as in the specialization of certain tweet threads intended for pedagogical transmission of argumentation (*sobering tweets*). Finally, at the interactive level, the abundance of retweets shows the absence of a specific "partisan" voice, which is displaced by leaders' voices, in line with the personalism and hyper-leadership of current politics of all kinds. In a different regard, the analysed discourse stands out because it can be condensed into the idea of *negation acting as a fundamental enunciative position*: the other is negated and consequently any discursive legitimacy is also denied. The analysed speech is above all a reactionary speech (in a literal sense: non-initiating) as well as a monological one.

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# *Blaverismo* and the Valencian extreme right: a historical analysis of their relationship and evolution

**Idoia Arreaza Aguilera**

## Introduction

Spanish democratic Transition [*la Transición*] was accompanied in the Valencian territory by a political movement that would significantly condition its politics: *blaverismo*. This regionalist movement emerged in the late 1970s and has been defined as populist, conservative, and anti-Catalan. In addition, some authors include features of reactionism and the extreme right to define the movement (Viadel, 2009). *Blaverismo* played a major role both at street-level and institutional politics during the Transition years and the 1980s, particularly after *Unió Valenciana* (UV) was created as a political party.

Starting in the 1990s, the progressive institutional decline of UV paved the way for the development of what since the eighties was referred to as populist parties, meaning "new extreme right" (Rodríguez, 2006), "radical right-wing populism" (Betz, 1994) or later "radical populist right" (Mudde, 2007). In the Valencian Country several extreme right groups have tried to mobilize social discontent in order to capture protest vote by using identity discourses shared with *blaverismo* as well as violent political mobilization actions. These groups have also used concepts commonly associated with the radical such as "insecurity", "crime", and "immigration". Despite this, the electoral presence of the extreme right remained insignificant until the 2000 decade, which saw the emergence of the far-right España2000 (E2000) party, and later Vox.

This chapter overviews *blaverismo*'s evolution as a social and political movement from the Transition to the present. The aim is to identify its relationship with the extreme right that emerged at the end of General Franco's dictatorship. The text will also analyze these parties' electoral presence and their voter profile, with special emphasis in Vox case for the 2019 regional elections.

## Recent origins: the battle of Valencia

The Valencian Country experienced some of the harshest tensions during the Transition throughout Spain. Known as the Battle of Valencia [*la Batalla de Valencia*], the main conflict dealt with identity and symbolic issues that strongly divided Valencian society, which led to a time characterized by the presence of political violence (Cucó, 2002). The political struggle was structured around two different ways of understanding Valencian identity, symbols and language: nationalist Valencianism (or simply Valencianism) and Valencian regionalism (or *blaverismo*).

Valencianism has been defined as a political and cultural thought whose main focus is the defense of self-government of the Valencian territory, as well as the preservation of its linguistic and cultural personality (Bodoque, 2011). Since the sixties, this trend was intellectually led by Joan Fuster, author of "Nosaltres els valencians" (Fuster, 1962). During the early seventies, Valencianism was started being reformulated and different left-wing groups emerged within it championing political Valencianism's updating. With the arrival of the Transition, the movement achieved the support of the autonomist path among the main leftist formations, all of which also agreed regarding language unity ("Valencian and Catalan are the

same language"), and showed consensus over symbols (flag, name, etc.) that should characterize the Valencian autonomous community.

*Blaverismo* originally arose as a reaction to Valencian nationalism. Some authors place it within the extreme right spectrum due to its violent actions and its links with ultra right-wing groups. However, not all *blaverismo* can be considered to be part of (or have established links with) the extreme right (Viadel, 2009). Its main characteristics are: populism, anti-Catalanism, conservatism and anti-modernizing rhetorical reformulation, regionalism, provincialism and Spanishism (i.e. Spanish nationalism), partisan politicization, and essentialism (Flor, 2011).

Although some historical precedents can be tracked back in time, *blaverismo* really comes to life during the Transition to democracy. It was those years that saw most reactionary leaders of the Valencian center and the right spectrum assuming anti-Catalanist speeches, opposing language unity discourses and the use of symbols that showed to a shared history between Valencian Country, Aragon and Catalonia. The Valencian Country Socialist Party's (PSPV in its Valencian acronym) victory in the 1977 general elections within Valencian territories, and its coinciding approach with political Valencianism, initiated a process of strategic and organizational reorientation within the Valencian brand of the party that was in charge of the government at the Spanish State-level: the more liberal leaders were dismissed, and anti-Catalan discourse was incorporated into the party's ideology (Flor, 2011). Las Provincias newspaper served as the spokesperson for this movement, which successfully penetrated the *fallas* cultural sector and Valencian football. In 1977 a key organization within *blaverismo* was created: Grup d'Acció Valencianista (hereinafter referred to as GAV). GAV's main focus has been the defense of Valencian cultural and artistic heritage through violent means, thus being defined as an undemocratic and far-right group (Flor, 2011). GAV was initially led by Rafael Orellano, but its most prominent leader has been Juan García Sentandreu, who has had an active presence both within *blaverismo* and, later, Valencian extreme right.

The peak moment in the battle between *blaverismo* and Valencianism occurred during preparation for the Valencian Statute of Autonomy [*Estatut d'Autonomia*], which was drafted during a long process of street agitation. The Statute draft that was approved by the Valencian regional parliament included aspects such as the use of the territorial denomination "País Valencià" [Valencian Country in Valencian language], or the adoption of the landmark *cuatribarrada* [literally four-striped] flag (as in Aragon and Catalonia). However, the Statute that was finally approved included important modifications: the territory was referred to as "Comunitat

Valenciana" [Valencian Community in Valencian language], and the established flag added a vertical blue strip with crowns to the landmark one. It was actually the new flag's vertical strip color—blue—,"blau" in Valencian, that gave the movement its name (Català, 2012). In the end, article 151's "fast lane to autonomy" demanding requirements could not be met (Bodoque, 2009). The Battle of Valencia soon faded into the background after the completion of the Statute draft and the socialist victories in the 1982 general elections and in the 1983 regional elections.

## **Blaverismo and the far right during the Transition**

During the Transition *blaverismo* experienced a strong growth, especially in the city of Valencia. The core principles that inspired the movement entrenched among the urban middle classes, and soon spread among the lower ones. In June 1978 in a call from UCM-related sectors the party, backed by Las Provincias newspaper, gathered 20,000 people in Valencia's bullfighting ring. Starting in 1980, UCD's crisis was taken advantage of by a party split that was called Unió Valenciana (UV). Initially born as an association, UV became a party in 1982 and tried to present itself as *blaverismo*'s new standard-bearer. The party built its ideology around a conservative Valencian regionalism and, above all, on a strong anti-Catalan sentiment (Flor, 2009; Alegre, 2016). In the 1983 regional elections, UV signed a pact with Alianza Popular (the current Partido Popular) and other parties that guaranteed its presence in the Valencian parliament. In the 1987 regional elections, UV obtained 6 seats. A success that was repeated in 1991, obtaining 7 seats (Flor, 2006). During its first years the party was led by Vicente Ramos and Miguel Ramón Izquierdo (Alegre, 2016).

Traditionally, *blaverismo*'s ties to the extreme right have been very close. In fact, confusing one for the other has been a constant in Valencian politics, and determining where one begins and where the other ends is not always easy. On the one hand, the different small groups of the Valencian extreme right have tended to incorporate key features of *blaverismo*, such as anti-Catalan, conservative and provincial attitudes. However, not all *blaverismo* shares this identification with the extreme right. Institutional *blaverismo* has maintained an anti-Catalan and conservative discourse, while renouncing to the use of violence. The connection becomes more ambivalent for the non-institutional sector, especially during the Transition years.

Progressively Valencian extreme right adopted *blaverismo*'s anti-Catalanism without much reluctance. In a way, it was coded in its DNA, since *blaverismo*'s

anti-Catalan strategy's antecedents stemmed precisely from the cultural and political persecution carried out by Franco's regime. In fact, opposition to anything originating in Catalonia was the cornerstone that united the most reactionary sectors, either on an ideological level or strictly in terms of identity.

In addition to ideological connections, *blaverismo's* and the Valencian extreme right's most radical groups also collaborated in their crusade against Catalanism and, by extension, against Valencianism (Viadel, 2017)—eventually, also against immigrants or sexual freedom activists. Violent acts are still carried out to this day (Cucó, 2002), however, the bulk of these actions took place until GAV's associative decline in 1982 took place. A key figure within these small groups was José Luis Roberto Navarro. A businessman with a presence in the world of hostess clubs, gyms and Valencian private security companies, Roberto Navarro was a prominent leader of Valencian far-right groups, such as Acción Radical and Frente Antisistema (see below). Roberto Navarro also participated in several violent actions and was associated with (although never convicted for) the placing of two bombs in Valencianist meetings that took place in 1976 (Sebastià, 1990).

While the extreme right experienced a wide growth, and although the number of parties professing this ideology during the Transition was very large, it never reached institutional relevance. Initially, the most preeminent was Partido Español Nacional Socialista [Spanish National Socialist Party] (PENS), which organized street activism based on a purely right-wing orthodox ideology (Rodríguez, 1998). PENS was made up of a large number of small political groups, among which the Movimiento Social Español [Spanish Social Movement] (MSE) stood out—with an important presence in Valencia—, and the Grupos de Acción Sindicalista [Trade Unionist Action Groups] (GAS) or the Juventud Española en Pie [Standing Spanish Youth] (JEP). These groups were relatively strong at street level and led of many violent acts committed against bookstores, cultural spaces and even the media (Gallego, 2006).

The main far-right party during the Transition was Fuerza Nueva [New Force] (FN). Its leader was Blas Piñar, a relevant figure of the Franco regime who was expelled from Alianza Popular for refusing to accept Spain's 1978 Constitution. FN defined itself as non-denominational, but its speech was one "of patriotic exaltation and defense by any necessary means of an extreme Catholicism", in turn managing to bring together many of Franco's former followers (Gallego, 2006). From its creation in 1976 until its 1982 dissolution, FN's main electoral success was obtaining one seat in Madrid's 1979 elections. After the 1981 coup and FN's 1982 general election

failure, the extreme right divided into two currents: a traditional sector focused on vindicating Francoism, and another sector made up of younger people who tried, without much success, to renew the party's ideology (Viñas, 2013).

## **Blaverismo's institutionalization and extreme right political violence (1983-1995)**

Between 1983 and 1995 the Valencian Country was governed by absolute majority Valencian Country Socialist Party (PSPV) cabinets, with AP / PP becoming the main opposition party. During much of the 1980s and early 1990s, *blaverismo* was almost exclusively institutionally articulated through *Unió Valenciana* (Flor, 2011). In the first term—1983 to 1987—UV made electoral alliances with right-wing and conservative political parties such as AP. Later on, it also came closer to other more moderate parties. Its presence in the Valencian Parliament allowed for UV to experience a certain expansion, which the party used to fuel the identity conflict with Valencianism or with anything related to Catalanism. Over time other conservative formations—especially the PP—took advantage of the identity agenda set by UV and incorporated the conflict into their discourse (Alegre, 2016).

UV's most politically relevant moment took place the very the moment its electoral decline began. In the 1995 regional elections PPCV—the Valencian brand of the old AP—obtained 52 seats: the exact same seats as the sum of those obtained by the PSPV and *Esquerra Unida* (EU). UV's 5 seats meant a decline compared to previous elections, however, they were crucial in leading to a government pact with PP. Through this pact the PP won *Generalitat Valenciana's* presidency, granting UV a minor role within the government and Valencian Parliament's presidency (Bodoque, 2009).

Regardless of the fact that during this period institutional *blaverismo* reached its peak political media coverage, outside institutional politics the movement was disorganized and disjointed. During these years, political violence acts continued to take place, although more sporadically and spontaneously than in the previous period. In fact, GAV's activity slowed to a halt during this period. The gap created by its absence was filled by the emergence in 1991 of *Grup Vinatea*. This new movement was theoretically a totally different entity from GAV, although they both shared the same ideological foundations and violent practices. The close connection between *Grup Vinatea* and GAV suggests that the former was the public name that the

latter used to distance itself from its own violent actions. Grup Vinatea's first signed graffiti appeared in 1991, just after demonstrations called for and led by the GAV. Furthermore, starting in 2002 judicial investigations began connect Grup Vinatea's actions to GAV's (Flor, 2011). However, Grup Vinatea never got access to means through which it could have increased its visibility and it ended up dissolving in 2004.

*Blaverismo's* political and electoral growth gave Valencian extreme right a higher profile via the latter's violent political actions. *Blaverismo* slowly abandoned street-level politics due to its electoral results, leaving an empty space to be filled by the extreme right. Organizations within this ideological spectrum such as Democracia Nacional (DN), Acción Radical, Frente Antisistema (FAS) or the Hermandad Armagedón, tried to politically and electorally channel Spanish ultra-nationalism, however they failed to achieve political representation. These groups later turned out to be direct predecessors of España2000 (Viñas, 2013). It should also be noted that both Acción Radical—active between 1990 and 1995—and FAS featured José Luis Roberto's presence, known as one of Valencian extreme right's main leaders (Garrido, 2009).

On April 11, 1993, one of Valencian extreme right's most cruel actions took place, the consequences of which have actually become a symbol of struggle for Valencian nationalism and anti-fascism. Guillem Agulló, a young anti-fascist militant, was assassinated by the extreme right. This crime was related to extreme right-wing youth linked to Democracia Nacional (DN) and Acción Radical. In fact, the main aggressor, Pedro Cuevas, stood as candidate for the 2007 municipal elections in far-right party Alianza Nacional's list; while Manuel Canduela, co-author of the crime, was Democracia Nacional's leader until 2018 (Casals, 2009). A few months after Guillem's assassination another murder involving of the Valencian extreme right took place, this time the victim being young anti-fascist militant Davide.

In 1993, the creation of Movimiento Social Republicano (MSR) was a first facelift attempt for the extreme right, which again remained electorally insignificant. Led by Juan Antonio Llopart, this party defined itself as "Europeanist, socialist, federal and republican" (Viñas, 2013). However, its alliances placed it within the extreme right spectrum. In fact, according to MSR documents, during its last years the party had ties to España2000 and Hogar Social Madrid.

## **Blaverismo's reinvention and a 'new' Valencian extreme right (1995-2003)**

The 1995-1999 term was a turbulent one, with strong internal divisions between PP and UV, as well as within institutional *blaverismo*. During that period, UV leader and president of the Valencian Parliament, Vicent González Lizondo, was involved in several organizational conflicts that considerably weakened him. In the first place, González Lizondo progressively distanced himself from the party's previous leaders. Shortly after, he pushed the removal of the Joventut Valencianista (the UV youths), because its members were perceived by the party as being too Valencian and not *blavero* enough. Internal disputes and several health problems forced González Lizondo to hand over the party's presidency to Héctor Villalba. The party's new leader had an alternative ideological approach, which led to González Lizondo's dismissal from UV in 1996—who would die a year later (Alegre, 2016).

Disagreements within institutional *blaverismo* were taken advantage of by the governments' majority partner, the PPCV, which incorporated a large number of UV leaders (Bodoque, 2009).

The official four-year term was exhausted, with UV's weakness growing along the way as well as PPCV's electoral expectations. In fact, during this period, the PPCV had already established a *blavero* current within its ranks, which led to UV being gobbled up. In addition, during this term, the PP-UV coalition modified the electoral threshold, raising it from 3% to 5%, in order to prevent access into Valencian Parliament of Valencianist party Unitat del Poble Valencià (UPV) (Alegre, 2016). However, the outcome was not quite the expected one since, although UPV did not obtain any seats, UV obtained only 4.76% votes in the 1999 elections, leaving the party without any institutional representation. The party did not have any seats at the municipal level either. Although, years later UV was recast with new leaders and a return to their original ideas (Bodoque, 2009), the party never again obtained representation in the Valencian Parliament.

The UV crisis ran parallel to *blaverismo*'s extra-institutional path's resurgence led by GAV. In 1994, this group chose Juan García Sentandreu as its new president (Flor, 2011). GAV's new leadership took up political violence actions, carrying out attacks against other party's headquarters, such as UPV-Bloc Nacionalista's. Several historical GAV leaders were convicted for these events, such as Manolo Latorre, who had replaced Juan García Sentandreu as the party's president since 2001, and has still not been ousted to this date (Garrido, 2002).

Furthermore, *blaverismo's* institutional disarticulation occurred at a time when the extreme right was still quite active in Valencia, with active groups such as Hermandad Nacional Socialista Armagedón. In 2003, this group joined FAS, a collective with an almost exclusive presence in Valencia and its surroundings, which was known for carrying out "human hunts" focused on left-wing militants, anarchists and immigrants—especially Muslim, sub-Saharan and Latin American (Büttner, 2011). Although no prominent leaders of the group are known, there is evidence that shows that they had close relationships with other groups such as MSR or Alianza Nacional (Casals, 2013).

In the year 2000 general elections a new coalition of far-right groups was presented that would become the seed of España2000. Plataforma España2000 brought together groups such as Murcia's Partido Nacional del Trabajo (PNT), MSR and Vértice Español—another far-right organization about which there is not much information to be found. In Valencia Plataforma España2000 was led by José Luis Roberto, and in addition to the already mentioned groups, it incorporated Democracia Nacional (DN).

This platform, precursor to España2000, opted from its very start for a conservatism based around traditional family and marriage models, with its main antagonists being nationalists and independentists—against which Spain's unity must be defended—, immigrants, squatters and anti-fascist social movements. Furthermore, the platform developed a strong discourse in favor of increasing public spending on police and military, along with toughening sentences for terrorism crimes (López, 2017). Plataforma España2000 did not even reach 1% of the votes.

After Plataforma España2000's electoral failure José Luis Roberto founded España2000 (E2000). The party was officially established in Valencia, and it defined itself as "populist, social and democratic", although it has been broadly classified within the extreme right realm (López, 2017; Sánchez and Rodríguez, 2013). E2000 was created as a hierarchical and pyramidal organization in which its president had a very strong leading role. In the local sphere, the party was structured in *milicias*, *escuadras* and *centurias* according to number of members and their recreational, sporting and religious affinities. The number of card-carrying members of the party have fluctuated between 1,000 at the time of its creation and 3,300 in 2016 (López, 2017).

## España2000 and Grup d'Acció Valencianista (2003-2015)

Though confined within informal realms, relations between far-right groups and *blaverismo* remained active during the early years of the 21st century. In this period GAV, *blaverismo*'s main engine, lost stamina at street level. An attempt was made to solve this loss of visibility by initiating close contacts with the Valencian football sphere, particularly within Valencia CF. Thus, GAV's leadership began to organize around the Peña Valencianista Grup d'Acció (Patiño, 2019), while Acción Radical went for controlling a large part of the Yomus group (Flor, 2009). This ultra-rightist and anti-Catalan group carried out numerous violent incidents, which granted it prominent visibility in Mestalla (Valencia CF's stadium). In the 2009-2010 football season, Yomus created—along with other extreme right-wing groups—Curva Nord, an official Valencia CF cheering stand (Flor, 2011) that has led major riots and has explicitly been identified as extreme right. Thus, this space became mostly associated with the extreme right and *blaverismo*.

España2000 was officially created and legalized in 2002. This party's trajectory can be divided into two different stages, especially if political mobilization actions are taken into consideration (López, 2017). The first stage takes place from 2003 until the 2007 regional electoral pre-campaign. At this early stage the party focused on defending Spain's and in anti-Catalanism. The latter allowed for relations with *blaverismo* to be maintained, especially on *Día del País Valencià* [Valencian Country day]—which takes place on October 9—; and on *Día de la Hispanidad* [Hispanic Heritage Day]—which is celebrated on October 12 (López, 2017). During this period, E2000's leader, José Luis Roberto, established close connections with neo-Nazi groups, prostitution companies, security enterprises, gyms, and illegal fights (Salas, 2011).

Starting in 2007, E2000 focused its discourse around "the autochthonous-foreign axis that was made visible in the adoption of an anti-immigration and ultra-conservative program which departed from the majority conservative party's, the Popular Party" (López, 2017; 67). In the Valencian Country, the PP tried to distinguish itself from E2000 by applying mildly integrating immigration policies such as those found in the *Ley 15/2008, de 5 de diciembre de la Generalitat, de Integración de las Personas Inmigrantes en la Comunitat Valenciana* law. At the same time, the far-right party tried to dissociate itself from its violent drifts by prohibiting the display of fascist symbols in all public acts. This decision was not very successful, given the fact that to this day symbols celebrating general Franco have continued

to appear in their demonstrations (López, 2017). Thus, it can be inferred that this was a cosmetic decision taken with public opinion in mind, rather than a sign of the party taking a new direction.

In 2007, España2000 approved a new political document in which it defined itself as a "new" and democratic party whose aims were not to fight against the system. Since then, the party has tried to pose itself as the main alternative to the PP, which it accuses of carrying out traditional politics based around corruption and it blames for the economic crisis. In E2000's electoral programs for the 2011 and 2015 Valencian regional elections—the latter being E2000's last time running for elections—, three central axes can be distinguished: nationalism, populism and authoritarianism (López, 2017). These are traits common to radical right-wing populist parties family (Mudde, 2007).

Despite its different attempts to evolve and adapt, España2000 never obtained electoral representation beyond the local sphere (its electoral progress data is shown in Annex 1). As for the general elections, E2000's increase in votes between 2004 and 2011 did not amount to any seats being obtained either in the National Parliament or the Senate. Regarding Valencian regional elections, between 2003 and 2011 E2000's results experienced a certain increase, going from 2,650 votes to 12,191. However, between the 2011 and 2015 elections the party experienced a significant loss of votes. In any case, these results are very far from having reached the necessary threshold to obtain representation in Parliament. In the municipal elections, a similar evolution to the one that took place in the Valencian regional elections could be observed. Between 2003 and 2007, the increase in votes was quite significant, going from 998 in 2003 to 8,066 in 2011. However, as was the case for the regional elections, in the 2015 municipal elections E2000 experienced a significant loss of votes, although the party obtained its second best result.

The progressive structuring and electoral growth of the Valencian extreme right run parallel to Unió Valenciana's *blaverismo's* consolidation problems. UV's new leader, José María Chiquillo, tried to recover the party's founding principles, and joined forces with other *blaversimo* small parties in order to run as a coalition for the 2003 regional elections, again failing to reach the 5% electoral threshold. The party did not run either for the 2003 municipal elections or the 2004 general elections, although they closed a deal with the Popular Party by virtue of which a UV leader would be included as an independent candidate in the lists for the Senate. José María Chiquillo obtained the seat at the Senate but ended up leaving the party after several internal disputes, however he never resigned as a senator. UV once

again suffered an institutional and internal crisis. The leader at that time, Joaquín Ballester Sanz, resigned shortly after, leaving the party under José Manuel Miralles' leadership (Flor, 2011). Thus began UV's decomposition, which culminated in 2011, when the president of the Generalitat Valenciana appointed Miralles Statutory Development general director in exchange for his support during that year's electoral campaign. In 2014, Miralles was dismissed by Alberto Fabra and the party ceased all activity, closed its headquarters and ended all online presence.

During UV's slow decomposing GAV tried to promote a new party within *blaverismo*: Coalició Valenciana. The new party was led by Juan García Sentandreu (who had left GAV's leadership in 2001) and included former UV leaders, as well as some personalities from the *fallas* scene. Coalició Valenciana (CV) has been defined as a *blavero* and far-right party. In fact, its electoral program for the 2011 elections (the last ones they ran for) focused on citizen insecurity, illegal immigration, anti-Catalanism, opposition to corruption and the idea that "the best services are the ones we don't have". CV's institutional presence never exceeded the municipal scope, except for the time a defector PP deputy joined the ranks of the Coalició Valenciana during the 2003-2007 term, later being expelled from the *blavero* party in 2009 (Flor, 2011). The party ceased its activity in 2011 and all its members redirected their activities towards GAV and a new group of little-known entities, the Coordinadora d'Entitats Culturals del Regne de València.

## The new populist radical right (2015-2020): enter Vox

España2000 did not run for the 2015 general elections and there was no presence of purely *blavero* parties running for the regional elections. E2000 argued that the reasons behind their choice was to avoid voter dispersion among parties that shared the defense of Spain's unity as a key point. In these elections, former leaders of the Valencian extreme right and *blaverismo*, such as Juan García Sentandreu, joined Vox. The radical populist right party shared many programmatic demands with E2000 and Coalició Valenciana.

### Defining Vox and its main characteristics

Vox is a Spanish state-level party, founded in 2013 by former members of the PP and other far-right parties, which has been defined as far-right and ultra-

nationalist Spanish (Ferreira, 2019). However, the party's ideological nature raises controversies: some authors hold that Vox is nothing but an accentuated version of the PP's traditional conservatism; whereas others consider that it represents a case of the radical populist right in Spain (Ferreira, 2019). Vox's ideology presents traits commonly associated to nativism, and is based on an authoritarian conception of society stemming from "law and order" values (Ferreira, 2019). However, this party notably differs from the extreme right analyzed above in the fact that, to this date, no violent actions perpetrated for political purposes can be attributed to it. Authors such as Ferreira (2019) define the party as "an ultra-right organization that fits the characteristics of the radical right-wing party family".

Alonso and Rovira (2015) have pointed out the factors that tend to lead to the appearance of this type of political parties: attitudes towards immigration, and political and democratic disaffection as a result of the 2007 economic crisis (Ferreira, 2019). All these factors seemed to take place during the mid-2010s, just in time for Vox to run for the first time in the May 2014 European elections under former PP member Alejo Vidal-Quadras' leadership. The party did not obtain representation in the European Parliament, however it was only 2,000 votes away from obtaining a seat. A few months later Santiago Abascal, also an former PP member, replaced Alejo Vidal-Quadras as party leader (Olalla, Chueca and Padilla, 2019). Abascal had held some political positions within the Basque PP and was also a promoter of the Fundación para la Defensa de la Nación Española (DENAES) between 2006 and 2014. Since 2019, he is also president of the Fundación Disenso, which currently operates as Vox's think tank.

The party also appeared on the Valencian political arena in 2014, but its presence was merely testimonial until the 2019 elections. Unlike most Spanish parties, Vox is not regionally organized using autonomous communities as a territorial criteria (since it proposes their suppression), but at the province level. A year after the 2019 regional elections Vox initiated a process in order to renew its presidency for the Valencian province's branch of the party. Candidates competing for control over Vox in the Valencian constituency needed a minimum 266 endorsements in order to access the internal electoral process. Among these candidates names such as José María Llanos, Juan García Sentandreu, Vicente Montáñez and Juan Ponce de Leis could be found. Finally José María Llanos was elected president for the Valencian province branch of the party since he was the only candidate who could obtain the necessary endorsements; with the remaining candidates being considered as part a sector of the party which is critical of Llanos.

As a result of the 2019 Valencian regional elections, where Vox obtained 281,608 votes (10.44%), the party currently has 10 seats in the Valencian Parliament. Ana Vega Campos is party's spokeswoman at the Valencian Parliament as well as the party's Alicante province's branch legal vice-secretary; María de los Llanos Massí Linares and José María Llanos Pitarch are the deputy spokespersons.

### **Vox's Valencian voter profile: a comparative approach**

Knowledge regarding a party's voter profile to a large extent helps us learn about electoral motivation, enabling us to delve into the reasons behind their vote. There are numerous existing analyses aiming to establish who exactly is Vox's voter, although—as can be seen—currently we are dealing with a still undefined voter. Explicatory variables differ depending on the electoral, regardless of the fact that these have taken place in little over a year. Nonetheless, we find two common variables that appear in all analyses—ideology and gender—; and one that is not shared by all, but is present in most of them—immigration.

A comparison between studies establishing Vox's voter profile in the 2019 general elections (Turnbull-Dugarte, Rama and Santana, 2020) and data from the 2019 Valencian regional elections (Arreaza, 2021) shows both similarities and differences.

Vox voters in Spain are younger than other parties', with an average age of 44.4, compared to the 52 average for other parties. The party also has a masculinized voter profile, which is congruent with parties right-wing populists tendencies: their electorate is comprised of 35% women, whereas the percentage goes up to 53% for the average of all other parties. Regarding voters' level of completed studies, Vox seems unlikely to receive votes from people with a high academic level (18.2% compared to an average of 25.5% for other parties), but also from those with just primary level education (11.2% compared to 21.4% for the rest). Most of its electorate completed high school education. Students are more likely to vote for Vox, while retirees and pensioners are the least likely to do so.

Regarding marital status, the majority of Vox voters are single, which are overrepresented while widowers are underrepresented. Authors do not find statistically significant differences regarding attendance to religious services, however more Catholics can be found among those who vote for this party. In terms of income Vox's electorate can be found between 1,201€ and 4,500 € per month. In

addition, people who live in households without any income are the most likely to vote for this formation.

Regarding perceptions, Vox voters consider that the economic situation is unfavorable, they feel exclusively or predominantly Spanish and their preferred territorial organization tends towards centralization. Additionally, there seems to be no hidden voting effect in the polls, however Vox voters do seem to decide their vote later than the rest—although not on very the last day.

In the 2019 general elections there were more Vox voters regretting their vote than any other parties', however they would likely vote again for this party, although leaks seem to point to the PP and Ciudadanos.

When studying Vox's voter profile within Valencian territories, it can be concluded that the probability of voting for this party in the 2019 Valencian regional elections was also higher among the male and younger electorate: the Valencian Vox voter is under 45 years of age. Regarding employment situation, we find a voter profile without a current occupation: students, retirees, unemployed people or pensioners.

The analysis of completed level of studies points in the same direction as conclusions drawn at the state level studies: an electorate with primary or secondary education levels stands out. This marks a difference between Vox and España2000's voters, which showed a more heterogeneous profile: young people and retirees (students and retirees in their work situation) and blue collar workers and lower class (López, 2017).

Regarding Vox's Valencian votes origin, the variable showing sympathy towards other parties, as well as its relationship to others variables from the model, could seem to indicate Vox votes coming from the PPCV. However, since the reference model lacks data regarding votes' origin, we can only conclude that a high level of sympathy towards the PPCV is shown on the part of Vox's Valencian electorate.

As Ivarsflaten (2005) shows, a large part of current far-right party voters are unemployed, while, traditionally, the PPCV has enjoyed a remarkable electoral successes within lower class voters. It should be noted that España2000's slight (but not irrelevant) growth came from old PPCV voters but also, as in Vox's case, from abstentionists and new voters. Still, Vox voters show some sympathy towards Ciudadanos, and there is an inverse relationship regarding sympathy towards the Valencian leftist parties that are part of the current government (PSPV, Compromís

and Unides Podem): the more sympathy towards these parties, the less probability of voting for Vox.

At the territorial level, Vox's voter is located mainly in the province of Alicante, where the PPCV has historically obtained its greatest electoral successes, and Ciudadanos has also achieved a remarkable electoral space. Vox obtains the highest number of votes in Alicante's southern regions. These are the regions have the highest immigration rates in recent decades and that also present high unemployment rates as a result of the 2007 economic crisis. It must also be noted that these territories have traditionally also showed a remarkable presence of the extreme right (particularly Bajo Segura and Vinalopó Medio regions). These southern Alicante regions have witnessed E2000's highest growth during the past decade (López, 2017).

Vox's electorate is located to the right of the ideological axis and, as in the reference analyses, Valencian Vox voters have a preference for territorial centralization. This variable is closely related to the fact that this party's voter at the regional level votes with State-level issues in mind.

## Conclusion

In recent years, extreme right parties have experienced an exponential growth, in some cases even accessing government positions. As this chapter showed, the extreme right has been present in the Valencian Country since the early years of Transition to democracy. However, in most cases it has turned out to be electorally very marginal, choosing to focus on (occasionally violent) political mobilization, rather than on electoral politics. The chapter has also pointed out the numerous evidences regarding the ties and interactions that these parties have had with *blaverismo*.

The Valencian Country was one of Spain's territories where political tensions peaked the most during the Transition. The Battle of Valencia fostered and favored a notable presence of political violence that produced an important political and social fracture within Valencian society. Valencian left's good relations and its favorable electoral prospects encouraged a reaction by the right by means of a turn towards anti-Catalanist discourses. As has been shown, *blaverismo* arose fundamentally from the Spanish social and political sectors and heirs of the Franco regime, and presented two main currents. The first and more institutional one, was represented

by Unió Valenciana, which obtained institutional representation during the 1980s and 1990s. In 1995, UV reached its highest political relevance since its support became the key to the PP's first government formation. However, internal problems and the PP's co-opting strategy left the party without electoral representation as of 1999. The second current, more keen to political mobilization actions outside the institutional realm, took shape through Grup d'Acció Valencianista (GAV). The extreme right was unable to obtain relevant electoral representation, but was particularly successful in its political mobilization actions. Firstly it fought to occupy *blaverismo* spaces and later, to create synergies.

As has been shown throughout the chapter, not all *blaverismo* can be identified with the extreme right, although a remarkable part of it can. The contacts and ties have been more relevant in the *blaverismo*'s non-institutional sphere, but a certain convergence also began to take place at the electoral level starting in the 2000s. The most organized version of the extreme right came with España2000's arrival. The party run for all elections from 2003 to 2015, at which point it handed over its electoral space to Vox—although it continues to run for municipal elections. Vox was founded in the Valencian Country as a party welcoming both España2000's former leaders and electorate, as well as *blaverismo* leaders. In 2015 Vox experienced little electoral success. Despite this, incorporating both *blaverismo*'s and the extreme right discourses the party has obtained remarkable institutional presence in subsequent elections. Currently it holds 10 seats in the Valencian Parliament.

Finally, the chapter showed and analysis of Vox voters' profile in the last regional elections. As has been shown, Vox voters share characteristics with the PPCV's old electorate, with Ciudadanos voters, to a large extent, with España2000's. However, further analyses will be necessary in the future, since the data available at the time of publication is still that of a party at its very early stages.

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## Annexes

Table 1. Evolution of the results of España 2000 in the general elections (2004-2011)

Election	Votes	% of votes
2004	4,231	0.02 %
2008	6,906	0.03 %
2011	9,266	0.04 %

Source: own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of the Interior.

Table 2. Evolution of the results of España 2000 in the regional elections of Valencian Country (2003-2015)

Election	Votes	% of votes
2003	2,650	0.11 %
2007	5,934	0.24 %
2011	12,191	0.49 %
2015	7,456	0.27 %

Source: own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of the Interior.

Table 3. Evolution of the results of España 2000 in the municipal elections (2003-2019)

Election	Votes	% of votes
2003	998	0.005 %
2007	3,790	0.01 %
2011	8,066	0.04 %
2015	5,591	0.025 %
2019	3,627	0.015 %

Source: own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of the Interior.

Table 4. Comparison of Valencian regional election results between Vox and España 2000 (2011-2019)

	ESPAÑA2000		VOX	
	Votes	% of votes	Votes	% of votes
Regional elections 2011	12,191	0.48 %	Does not exist	
Regional elections 2015	7,509	0.31 %	10,336	0.42 %
Regional elections 2019	Only stand for municipal elections		281,608	10.44 %

Source: own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of the Interior.

## Conclusion

# Southern Europe's fourth wave of radical right

Oscar Barberà

## Introduction

The Great Recession's political impact has received remarkable attention by the most recent academic efforts, particularly in southern Europe. An important part of these analyses has focused on protest movements and new political parties that have emerged in recent years (Bosco & Verney, 2017; della Porta *et al.*, 2017; Morlino & Raniolo, 2017; Kriesi *et al.*, 2020). Although some first comparative studies have been published regarding radical right's organizational and political transformations in southern Europe, many of the analyses are still limited to the electoral field (Ruzza, 2018; Mendes & Dennison, 2021).

Building on insight from the previous chapters, this concluding text's aim is to offer a comparative view of the fourth radical right wave in southern Europe (France, Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal). Therefore, the chapter is structured in three

major sections. The first one explores the changes that have taken place in political supply—taking into account transformations experienced by old parties—, the emergence of new actors and it assesses their political relevance. The second section focuses on analyzing the main interpretations in existing literature regarding possible reasons for the radical right's marginality right up to the Great Recession. It also attempts to understand relevant factors leading to its growth throughout the 2010s. The third section attempts a qualitative balance of these parties' influence on public debate and electoral competition; on public policies, and overall on the whole political system. The text ends with some final thoughts shaping a conclusion.

## The old and new radical right in southern Europe since the Great Recession

The Great Recession's influence on the radical right's political supply in southern Europe has been very significant. However, the connection is not as direct as could be expected. This section explores the main organizational, ideological, and political transformations experienced by some of the major third-wave actors that have continued to be relevant since the late 2000s crisis. New actors are also introduced which have appeared over the years in countries such as Spain and Portugal. Finally, these parties' influence over their respective party systems is also explored.

### Old actors' transformations

Transformations in the radical right spectrum have been more than remarkable in Italy. However, this political space's evolution is not so much directly linked to the Great Recession's consequences, as to the transformations experienced by the Italian party system. Throughout this process of change, political parties have had the strong support of an heterogeneous constellation of radical right-wing groups that have operated both in person and online (Caiani & Carvalho, in this volume). The 2013 elections, the first since the crisis began, were a major blow for right-wing parties that had backed austerity policies. Moreover, in *Lega Nord's* case the 2013 elections did not go well due to a serious internal crisis that ended with historical leader Umberto Bossi's resignation and his replacement by a circumstantial candidate. After the 2013 elections, the party chose Matteo Salvini and opted for a major change of strategy. Taking advantage of Berlusconi's gradual withdrawal from politics, Salvini tried to lead the right-wing space across the country. That is the

reason behind his decision to change the party name—removing the word "Nord" from its logo—, and to create a sister party—*Noi con Salvini*—in order to establish itself in the rest of Italy. In the latest 2018 elections *Lega* has become the center-right coalition's majority partner, ahead of *Forza Italia*. As Caiani and Carvalho have shown, this strategic shift was accompanied by a major change in the party's discourse, focusing on immigration and Euroscepticism—rather in criticizing Rome's political elite—, and also by a successful use of digital communication. At the ideological level, changes were rather minor, since the party maintained its nativist, populist and illiberal claims. There were no major organizational changes either, since *Lega* remained a mass party with a federal structure (Caiani & Carvalho, in this volume).

There have also been important transformations within the *Front National* (FN) in France. The poor results obtained in the 2007 presidential election favored Jean-Marie Le Pen's resignation. At the 2011 convention, his daughter, Marine Le Pen, was chosen as the party's new leader. Under its new leadership, the FN began a process marked by greater professionalization and organizational centralization that run parallel to the personalization of its discourse around the new leader. These changes were also connected to a new strategy aimed at de-demonizing the party, which explains for the most extremist and nativist discourse being mitigated in favor of ethno-differentialism. Neo-fascist groups previously gravitating around the party were also kept at a distance, and younger candidates and outside personalities joined the party (Kelbel & Lanzone, in this volume). The culmination of this process came in 2018 when the FN changed its name to *Rassemblement National* (RN) aiming to become France's main right-wing party. Starting in the 2014 European elections, and connected to its new de-demonization strategy, the FN began building alliances in the European parliament. In 2015 the party led the creation of a new parliamentary group along with the Italian *Lega* and the British *UK Independence Party*. In the 2019 European election the RN revalidated its alliance with *Lega* by incorporating other parties such as *Alterantive für Deutschland* (Kelbel & Lanzone, in this volume).

Finally, in Greece, transformations have been conditioned by the formal continuity of Golden Dawn (*Χρυσή Αυγή* [*Chrysí Avgí*] in Greek) and of its leader Nikos Michaloliakos, who built the party around a strongly personalist organizational model. Despite the party's origins and its extra-parliamentary political activity during the 1980s and 1990s, it was not until 2007 that Golden Dawn decided to run for office (Ellinas, 2013). The party's initial results were poor, but in 2010 it managed to obtain representation in the city of Athens' town hall. This led to increased

national-level media attention which helped the party obtain representation in the 2012 general election. The party's initial ideological approaches were openly neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic, and it made use of political violence, and a strongly populist-inspired rhetoric (the people versus corrupt elites, etc.). In addition, the party defined itself as anti-communist and radically against bailouts (Ellinas, 2013; Georgiadou, 2013). In the context of a severe political crisis that took its toll on the two main parties in government, Golden Dawn rose to third place in the 2015 general elections (Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2015). However, from mid-2010 onwards, the party's legal problems regarding political violence intensified. In the 2019 elections the party was left without parliamentary representation, and shortly after the party's whole leadership—including the party leader himself—was found guilty of membership of a criminal organization.

### **New actors enter the scene**

A partial novelty in the transformation suffered by the Italian party system during the Great Recession was the creation of *Fratelli d'Italia* (Fdl). Although formally it can be considered a new party, Fdl is a clear heir to *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN). The formal discontinuity is due to the fact that AN initiated an organizational convergence process with Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*. The new party, *Il Popolo della Libertà* (Pdl), remained united for a few years until right before the 2013 elections some former AN members split to form *Fratelli d'Italia*. Evidence of the organizational continuity between Fdl and AN can be found in the preservation of neo-fascist-inspired rhetoric and principles, which was designed in order to attract both new generations and nostalgics. However, in this reconstruction process Fdl committed itself to the holding of primaries as one its organizational identity new features. Additionally, in these years a new leadership also emerged, that of Giorgia Meloni, who has led the party since 2014 (Caiani & Carvalho, in this volume).

As Marchi and Lisi have pointed out in their chapter, Portuguese radical right's main particularity is marked by a disobedient *Partido Social Democrata* (PSD) mayor, André Ventura, who became popular during the 2017 municipal elections for his nativist discourse against immigration and ethnic minorities. Ventura acted as a political entrepreneur by first pushing an internal faction to change PSD's strategic line, and then favoring a split in order to register *Chega* as a political party. Organizationally, *Chega* was constituted as a strongly personalist party under Ventura's charismatic leadership. The founding convention was held in June 2019, and it was joined by some of the leading intellectuals of the new Portuguese right.

Although the party's development process is still at a very early stage, *Chega's* discourse has thus far used populist rhetoric against the Portuguese political establishment (e.g. calling for the political system to be reformed into a presidential one), against egalitarian policies, or simply regarding law and order issues. However, the party can hardly be classified as Eurosceptic. *Chega* has also stood out for a remarkable mastery of social media, especially in sports television where Ventura was as a commentator (Marchi & Lisi, in this volume). From its very beginning *Chega* favored joining other small Portuguese right-wing parties to form coalitions. This was due to legal reasons, because at that time the party was not yet legalized and thus needed several parties in order to form a valid coalition in the run-up to the European elections. The coalition strategy was not enough for *Basta!*—the name with which it competed in the 2019 European elections—to obtain any seats at the European parliament. Furthermore, this alliance was not easily accepted by some partners, such as *Partido Popular Monárquico* (PPM) and *Democracia21*, which split off in the run-up to the 2019 legislative elections. On the other hand, *Chega* has never made any alliances with Portugal's main third-wave radical right-wing party, *Partido Nacional Renovador* (PNR), which has since lost electoral support and still has not achieved parliamentary representation (Marchi & Lisi, in this volume).

In Spain, the main transformation in the radical right took place with *Vox's* appearance in 2013. Originally the party was born as a split led by some prominent *Partido Popular* (PP) figures, the due to disagreements with the conformist strategy regarding economic policy and institutional reforms carried out by Mariano Rajoy, then President of the Government. The new split proposed centralizing reforms regarding the functioning of the *Estado de las Autonomías* [Spain's quasi-federal territorial organization form], more neoliberal ideas in economic policy, and the creation of new democratic mechanisms promoting political parties' regeneration (Barrio, in this volume; López and Borràs, in this volume). *Vox's* proposals were aimed at attracting a growing group of disillusioned conservative PP voters, not at capturing populist right-wing's traditional voter niches (Acha, 2021; Jaráiz, Cazorla & Pereira, 2021; Oliván, 2021). Unluckily for the party it stayed a very few votes away from obtaining representation in the 2014 European elections, which left the project at a dead end for a few years. At this time, its first leader resigned and Santiago Abascal took over the party's leadership. Abascal re-oriented the party's discourse towards law and order issues (pro-life, opposition to egalitarian policies), and called for the State of Autonomies' abolition (Gallardo, in this volume). *Vox's* new leader also implemented a professional use of the party's social media to spread its discourse, which starting in 2016 tried—without much success—to copy Trump's sovereigntist rhetoric. Abascal also encouraged an approach to the radical right parties and groups gravitating

around *Plataforma per Catalunya* and *España 2000*—which soon dissolved into the party (Barrio, in this volume; López & Borràs, in this volume; Arreaza, in this volume). Vox seized the window of opportunity that opened up in 2018, when the PP lost government due to various corruption scandals—starting a leadership succession race which electorally weakened it. Vox's access to representation in Andalusia's 2018 by-election was enough to give the party the media attention it needed in order to project at the national level. In the Autumn of 2019 general elections Vox managed to be the Spanish parliament's third political force.

**Table 1. Southern Europe's radical right main features parties since the Great Recession**

Party	New	Representation	Main leader	Ideology	Other issues
AD (G)	No	L (2012-19) E (2014-)	N. Michaloliakos	Nativist Populist	
Fdi (I)	Yes	L (2013-) E (2019-)	G. Meloni	Nativist Populist	
Chega (P)	Yes	L (2019-)	A.Ventura	Nativist Populist	Law and order, anti-corruption
Vox (E)	Yes	L (2019-)	S. Abascal	Nativist Populist	Law and order
FN/RN (F)	No	L (2012-) E (1984-)	M. Le Pen	Nativist Populist	Eurosceptic
Lega (I)	No	L (1992-) E (1989-)	M. Salvini	Nativist Populist	Eurosceptic

Source: Own elaboration. L: Legislative elections; E: European elections  
Caption: Fdi: Fratelli d'Italia; FN: Front Nacional, AD: Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή [Chrysí Avgí] in Greek)

## The radical right's new institutional thresholds since the Great Recession

Thus far we have dealt with organizational transformations, changes in leadership or branding, and discourse of the major radical right third-wave parties that are still relevant during the fourth wave that this conclusion analyzes. We have also looked at the organizational, leadership and discourse characteristics of the new radical right-wing parties that have emerged in recent years. However, so far we have not made any consideration as to these parties' relevance within their respective party systems.

In order to do so, it is useful to consider the political trajectories from the beginning of the Great Recession to the present day. The literature on the types of institutional thresholds that political parties can face throughout their political evolution dates back to Duverger and Sartori's seminal works (Duverger, 1954; Sartori, 1976), but it has since been adapted by several authors (Pedersen, 1982; Deschouwer, 2008; Elias & Tronconi, 2011). These have tended to agree that parties exceed several thresholds as they gain importance within a party system. Although there are some discrepancies about their number, some of the main thresholds identified by the literature are: the 'declaration threshold' that occurs when the party announces its intention to register with the electoral authorities; the 'authorization threshold' that corresponds with the time at which electoral authorities authorize the party's effective registration. These first two stages are relatively irrelevant for parties that have enough electoral support and do not question the establishment, but are more problematic to overcome for parties like the ones studied in this volume. The third stage, the 'representation threshold', is reached when the party manages to achieve parliamentary level representation. The transition from extra-parliamentary to institutional politics has been pointed out by the literature as one of the most important for all political parties. The next stage, the 'relevance threshold', is the most controversial of all because it reflects a party's ability to influence parties in government, and this influence can be exercised in a wide variety of ways. Finally, the maximum institutional impact, or 'government threshold', is accessed by being part of the parties that make up the highest executive body. Each time a threshold is exceeded it usually comes with significant organizational consequences and political strategy changes for the party. However, these changes are not always linear and can also be reversed, thus allowing us to identify several life trajectories. In addition, in multi-level systems, threshold analysis can be extended to different policy arenas (regional, national, European, etc.).

In the case of the parties analyzed in this conclusion, both their vital trajectories and the maximum thresholds achieved have varied substantially (Table 2). The table below does not include columns showing declaration or authorization thresholds, since the selection criteria involves parties that have at least obtained parliamentary representation at the national level. A quick look at the table shows that Italian radical right-wing parties have been the most influential thus far into the fourth wave. In the term that started in 2018, *Lega* achieved representation inside the national government, and *Fratelli d'Italia* played a supporting role in parliament. Besides the Italian case, the growing relevance of Marine Le Pen-led FN/RN stands out, since it managed to get through to second round in both the 2012 and 2017 French presidential elections. The rest of the parties in southern Europe have not

reached parliamentary-level relevance or presence in government. However, it must be stressed that this is not the case in other political arenas such as the regional or presidential: At the regional level parties such as *Vox* or *Rassemblement National* (RN) have achieved great political relevance.

These parties' trajectories have also been quite different. *Fratelli d'Italia* and *Lega* have been constantly present in the Italian parliament for years. In addition, as Caiani and Carvalho have noted in their chapter, *Lega* had already participated in the Italian government during Berlusconi time as Prime Minister (Bulli & Tronconi, 2011). On the other hand, after many years running for elections without ever obtaining parliamentary representation, Golden Dawn entered the Greek parliament during the heyday of the sovereign debt crisis, holding its presence until the 2019 elections, in which the party lost representation. In France, before the Great Recession, FN/RN had an intermittent and highly testimonial presence in the French national assembly. Since the 2012 elections, its presence is still very low but more stable and—above all—the party stands out for its prominence in the presidential election. In Spain *Vox* was unable to exceed the representation threshold in both the 2016 and 2015 general elections. However, after a few years as an extra-parliamentary party it did succeed in achieving representation in both 2019 legislative elections. Portuguese *Chega* presents the shortest trajectory from its creation until it exceeded the representation threshold, since its leader won a seat in the first parliamentary elections in which he ran.

**Table 2. Maximum institutional threshold reached by the different radical right-wing parties in Southern Europe since the Great Recession**

	Representation	Relevance	Government
Italy		FdI (2018-)	<i>Lega</i> (2018-19)
France		FN/RN (2012-)	
Greece	AD (2012-19)		
Portugal	<i>Chega</i> (2019)		
Spain	<i>Vox</i> (2019)		

Source: Own elaboration. For party acronyms see Table 1.

## From marginality to prominence: interpretations

As we pointed out in the introduction to this volume, radical right has been rather weak in southern Europe (von Beyme, 1988; Hainsworth, 1992; Davis, 1998; Ignazi, 2003; Ruzza, 2018). Hence, most approaches found in the literature have focused on finding the reasons behind their marginalization in their respective party systems. However, as shown above, these new and old parties' relevance has increased since the Great Recession. This has prompted reflections on their growth. The first part of this section carries out a comparative analysis of the factors limiting the rise of the radical right in southern Europe. The second one deals with the factors that have played a part in their rise in recent years.

### **Factors traditionally limiting radical right's growth in Southern Europe**

Several interpretations within the comparative literature have pointed out reasons behind radical right-wing parties' traditionally rather marginal roles in southern Europe. Most of these theories have combined several sets of factors focusing on citizens (demand) or on institutions or political actors (supply) (Ignazi, 2003; Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015; Ruzza, 2018; Mendes & Dennison, 2021).

One aspect that most comparative studies have tended to point out is the role played by authoritarian regimes' political legacies in hindering the rise of far-right parties. All of Southern Europe's countries, even those that became democratized during the 1970s (Spain, Greece, Portugal), quickly developed attitudes of support for democracy and its institutions. In addition, satisfaction with democracy overall increased during the years that democratic consolidation took place, especially during the economic growth experienced during the mid-1990s to the late 2000s (Morlino and Montero, 1993; Montero, Zmerli and Newton, 2008; Quaranta, 2018). Although the Transition to Democracy experiences were different in the Spanish, Portuguese or Greek cases, the long duration of their respective authoritarian regimes, as well as their very recent memory, undoubtedly explain citizens' reluctance towards parties that—as we have already pointed out in the introduction—, have often been based on nostalgic approaches (Ellinas, 2013, Marchi & Lisi; in this volume; López & Borràs; in this volume; Barrio, in this volume).

Nativist discourse based around xenophobia and blaming immigrants has also run into problems in various southern European countries. Overall, many of these

were for decades, emigration sending rather than immigration receiving countries. However, currently the differences between countries have become greater due to various historical circumstances. Immigration's relevance has been most prominent in France due to migratory dynamics derived from its colonizing past and the decolonization processes of the postwar period. On the other hand, much of those immigrating shared common elements, such as language. In the rest of the countries the colonial legacy may have had some influence in favoring migratory flows, but these were much smaller until the 1990s (Bleich, 2005).

Southern Europe has been recipient of many of the policies developed by European institutions. The Common Agricultural Policy has been very relevant in France, but also in other countries such as Spain. The new democracies that started joining the European institutions since the 1980s were for decades recipients of large amounts of cohesion funds. Hence, the Euroscepticism that has characterized other radical right-wing parties in Europe face more difficulties taking root in southern countries (Verney, 2011).

In contrast, feelings of disaffection characterized by disinterest in politics or distrust of political actors has tended to remain a structural feature of political culture in southern Europe (Torcal & Montero, 2006; Torcal & Magalhães, 2009). These elements created opportunities for populist actors seeking to channel or mobilize citizens' recurring distrust towards politicians and politics. State development limitations in southern Europe could also contribute to this. Public policy limitations or ineffectiveness, the existence of patronage-based networks, or corruption could fuel these protest movements (Diamandouros & Gunther, 2001; Gunther, Diamandouros & Sötéropoulos, 2006). However, both left and right protest movements have mobilized this discontent.

Finally, the strong influence exerted by religious institutions in southern Europe—particularly the Catholic Church—has tended to favor self-reproduction of social authoritarian values (i.e. law and order values). Though religiosity has been losing relevance along with these countries' increased developed, many of these societies have tended to move more slowly than northern ones in ascribing to post-materialist values. All of the above has made it difficult for a materialist/post-materialist political cleavage to be activated.

At the political supply level, some of the main explanations for the weakness of the radical right in southern Europe deal with the ways in which the structure of political cleavages has tended to obstruct the electoral growth of these parties.

The relevance of left/right conflicts in many of these countries, as well as the difficulties faced in articulating alternative conflicts—such those deriving from the materialist/post-materialist dimension—, certainly contribute to explain far right's growth limitations in these countries (Ignazi, 2003; Lisi, 2019). As we have pointed out, France is possibly the main exception due to the importance of immigration from the former colonies. In Spain's case, the literature has tended to point out, in addition, the coexistence of the left/right cleavage along with the center-periphery conflict (Rodríguez-Teruel *et al.*, 2019). The relevance of these two conflicts has tended to limit the presence of far-right parties, because center supporters' nativist appeals have tended to alienate the nativist support in the periphery (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015). Italy has also been an exception due to *Lega's* ability to successfully combine ethno-nationalism and nativism (Ignazi, 2005; Ruzza, 2018).

The importance of electoral systems as gates preventing access to far-right parties seems evident in many southern Europe countries, such as France, Spain and Portugal. As the Kelbel and Lanzone's chapter pointed out, in France the *Front National* gained access to the national parliament due to the introduction of proportional mechanisms by the 1980s electoral legislation, and it lost it when a return two-round majority system was later enforced. Also, in the French case *triangulaires* has been relevant as a mechanism allowing the FN/RN to access second round in several elections after exceeding the minimum threshold in the first. In Spain, small-sized districts combined with D'Hondt method has traditionally been pointed out as one of the main obstacles preventing new parties' entry or consolidation in the national parliament (López & Borràs, in this volume; Barrio, in this volume). Similarly, as Marchi and Lisi's chapter shows, the Portuguese electoral system has historically tended to make it difficult for far-right parties to gain access to parliament. Not surprisingly many of these parties have gained access to political representation for the first time in European Parliament elections. These tend to have much more proportional electoral system and, in addition, allow for parties to capitalize on the second-order effect that characterizes them (Reif & Schmitt, 1980).

Another factor highlighted by various authors in this volume is the strong competitive strategies showcased by right-wing parties. In the Italian case, Berlusconi reached several agreements with *Alleanza Nazionale* and *Lega Nord* in order to govern with their support. However, *Forza Italia's* leader's rise in popularity allowed him keep Italian far-right parties under subordination for more than two decades (Ruzza, 2018; Caiani & Carvalho, in this volume). In the Greek case, New Democracy's (*Νέα Δημοκρατία* [Néa Dimokratía] in Greek) jump into electoral politics also hindered Golden Dawn's (*Χρυσή Αυγή* [Chrysí Avgí] in Greek) advance, which

was unable to enter the Greek parliament until 2012 (Ellinas, 2013). Finally, in Spain *Partido Popular's* catch-all electoral strategy has also been pointed out as one of the main factors that hindered the rise of the far right (Casals, 2005; Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015)(Barrio, in this volume; López & Borràs, in this volume). In the French case, the moderate right used electoral agreements with FN/RN as a means to avoid the left from winning. Since the 2002 presidential election, when Jean Marie Le Pen managed to reach second round, French parties changed their attitude towards the FN, which contributed to its electoral stagnation for almost a decade. In fact, FN/RN's revival in the late 2000s started, among other reasons, due to Sarkozy's *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) change in electoral strategy, which aimed to attract more right-wing voters (Kelbel and Lanzzone, in this volume).

Finally, another relevant aspect is the political and electoral strategies carried out by radical right parties in southern Europe. As indicated in the introduction to this volume, dictatorial legacies' weight favored many of southern Europe's far-right parties to opt for nostalgic political discourses focused on vindicating an authoritarian past. Renewal of these discourses tended to be slower in some countries than in others, which possibly helps to understand the differences in their electoral evolution (Ignazi, 2003). In this respect, the French case is the most paradigmatic regarding renovation efforts, which began in the 1970s. On the other hand, up until a few years ago, ultra-right parties in Spain, Portugal and Greece faced many difficulties in reorienting their political strategies towards new political approaches. Other relatively important factors are connected to the treatment received during the respective Transitions (or processes of democratic consolidation), or their degree of fragmentation. The initial persecution of these parties in Portugal was an element that limited their chances of subsequent success (Marchi & Lisi, in this volume). On the other hand, fragmentation was an endemic of Spanish far-right parties of the Transition's early years (López & Borràs, in this volume; Arreaza, in this volume). In France, the fragmentation produced by several splits of the FN considerably limited its electoral possibilities during the 2000s (Kelbel & Lanzzone, in this volume).

## **Elements fostering radical right-wing's relevance**

Starting in the economic crisis of 2008, important changes regarding public policies began to take place in southern European countries. Some of them had to deal with a period of strong political instability in southern and western Mediterranean bordering countries. All of the above has produced certain attitudinal changes

that could have fostered permeability to radical right parties' discourses since the Great Recession. On the other hand, the literature has tended to state that the crisis' impact on the new political parties has been rather indirect. Social discontent with the main governing parties' management, as well as their internal problems (leadership, corruption) during the 2010s, created the window of opportunity which has enabled the growth of new right and left radical parties in southern Europe.

Austerity policies implementation—along with investigations into messed up government management—, and media exposure of patronage-based or corrupt practices, led to a significant increase in mistrust in the functioning of major institutions in southern European countries. However, mistrust especially grew towards the parties that were in government during those years, which had difficulty reconciling the growing social demands arising from the crisis with the implementation of the austerity policies imposed by the European institutions (Muro & Vidal, 2017). This created a certain atmosphere favoring populist discourses. However, it seems uncertain whether radical right parties were the most favored by that. Initially, this discontent was mostly capitalized by radical left parties (della Porta *et al.*, 2017; Morlino & Raniolo, 2017). The mobilization of public unrest's most direct and immediate consequence was an unprecedented electoral punishment for the parties in government (Bosco & Verney, 2012, 2016).

Confidence in both the European institutions and project also started declining in southern European countries during these years. On the one hand, the new Eastern European members states joining the EU in the 2000s led to changes in per capita income within the EU, which led to the gradual withdrawal cohesion funds from the southern European countries. This fact did not undermine the positive balance that most citizens made of membership in the EU, but it eroded the support of those who based their Europeanism on income transfer. In addition, the EU was blamed by many southern Europe national governments for the shift that started in 2010 towards austerity in public policies. EU intervention in the successive bailouts in Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy further encouraged the proliferation of critical speeches, especially by radical left parties (Rodríguez-Aguilera, 2012; Morlino & Raniolo, 2017). Radical right parties had more difficulty capitalizing on this discourse in southern Europe because many of them held positions in favor of economic liberalism, making it difficult to openly criticize austerity policies. In Greece, for example, far-right LAOS's support for austerity policies eventually led to its electoral demise (Ellinas, 2013).

The migratory factor has played out ambivalently since the Great Recession. On the one hand, the economic difficulties experienced by many southern European countries caused some of the immigrants that had arrived during the 2000s to return to their countries of origin. In addition, many young people in southern Europe led a new migratory exodus to northern European countries. On the other hand, the political instability that followed after the Arab Spring has been one of the factors driving radical right's growth in southern Europe. However, these circumstances have varied greatly depending on each country's specifics. In France, the main problem was the acts of political violence caused by radical Islam, which declined during the second half of the 2010s. In contrast, Greece and Italy have suffered considerable problems from illegal immigration caused, among other factors, by civil wars in Syria or Libya. For their part, Spain and Portugal have remained relatively oblivious to this problem due to the more or less politically stable situation in Morocco.

From the supply point of view there are several factors that may explain radical right's growing relevance in southern Europe. Firstly, and as noted in the first section of this conclusion, there have been important transformations (in leadership, brand, speeches, or alliances) in some of the old parties, like the FN/RN or *Lega*. New parties sharing similar approaches, such as *Vox* and *Chega*, have also appeared, which hindered their stigmatization (Mendes & Dennison, 2021). In addition, in the case of Spain, *Vox*'s growth has been accompanied by a significant reduction in the fragmentation that this political space has traditionally suffered. However, this parties' transformation would hardly have been successful without the coverage given by different media. In the case of France or Italy, this coverage could be understood due to their parliamentary presence since before the Great Recession. In the rest of the world, these parties have been skilled enough to get their messages or activities to catch mainstream media attention. Part of this success is due to these parties' activity on social media (Caiani & Parenti, 2009, 2011). Also due to their use of provocations such as those that gave Salvini popularity in Italy, or Ventura in Portugal, or their organizational capacity showing off, such as the crowded event held by *Vox* in October 2018 (Caiani & Carvalho, in this volume; Marchi & Lisi, in this volume; López & Borràs, in this volume; Barrio, in this volume). Eventually, it is also fair to ask to what extent there has been interest on the part of some media or economic groups to support them to spread these parties' agenda.

Cleavage structure changes since the Great Recession may also have contributed to the growth of political parties such as *Vox*, *Lega* or Golden Dawn. On the other hand, this phenomenon's influence seems to be much more limited in countries such as France or Portugal (Lisi, 2019). In the Spanish case, the existence of two

cleavages—the socio-economic and the center-periphery—has been interpreted as an obstacle for the emergence of radical right parties, since many of these parties' central issues (ethno-nationalism or social authoritarianism) have been for the most part articulated by the *Popular Party* and some of the regional parties. It must be noted that traditionally in Spain, positions most strongly in favor of political centralism had been aligned with the Franco regime (Muñoz, 2008; Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015). However, as several authors have shown in this volume, this changed after the Great Recession due to support for decentralization being eroded in much of Spain, and to Catalonia's secessionist reaction. The nationalist competition between *Partido Popular* and *Ciudadanos* regarding how to re-centralize the State of Autonomies in order to respond to the Catalan challenge ended up feeding a third party, *Vox*—whose proposals were much more radical (Barrio, in this volume; López & Borràs, in this volume, Acha, 2021; Jaráiz, Cazorla & Pereira, 2021; Oliván, 2021). In Italy, the cleavage structure did not pose a problem for *Lega's* growth and consolidation. However, the party's process was also peculiar in that it had to set aside its secessionist traits, opting instead for nativism as a strategy towards becoming Italian right's main party. This was made possible by *Lega's* instrumental ethno-nationalism's low relevance (Ruzza, 2018, Caiani & Carvalho, in this volume).

Finally, the necessary (but not sufficient) element that has led to radical right's growth in southern Europe is related to traditional right-wing parties' weakness in a context of strong party system re-alignment (Mendes & Dennison, 2021; Rodríguez-Teruel, 2021 and in this volume). As already pointed out, this weakness results from various contextual factors (different for each country), but there is a common element derived from public unrest produced by austerity policies implemented after the economic crisis. In France, economic measures implemented by President Sarkozy during his term in office led to *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire's* (UMP) first-round defeat in the 2012 presidential elections. Despite UMP's transformation efforts, the party entered a deep crisis right before the 2017 presidential elections and failed to make it to second round, which Marine Le Pen did make. In Italy, Berlusconi's resignation in 2011 and *Il Popolo de la Libertà's* (Pdl) defeat in the 2013 elections was strongly connected to Italy's bailout and the austerity policies that followed. Pdl's poor results in those elections kept a window of opportunity open for *Lega's* growth. In Greece, New Democracy (*Νέα Δημοκρατία* [*Néa Dimokratía*] in Greek) lost the 2009 elections, which started a succession struggle within the party. However, despite being in opposition between 2009 and 2011, the party was involved in negotiating Greece's first bailout. Between 2012 and 2015, New Democracy was part of the national concentration government along the main

left-wing party in charge of implementing austerity policies. In Portugal, a similar situation took place, since *Partido Social Democrata* (PSD) was in opposition until 2011. Not being involved with managing the first austerity measures played in favor of their subsequent victory. However, their victory forced the party to lead a new coalition government that ended up implemented the bulk of Portuguese austerity policies. The PSD-led coalition revalidated its election victory in 2015, but failed to win a majority. This soon led a vote of no confidence that overthrew the 2015 newly constituted PSD-led coalition government. Since moving to the opposition its party leader resigned, starting up a long dispute over leadership that electorally weakened the party, which remained in opposition after the 2019 elections. The Spanish case bears similarities to the Portuguese one. *Partido Popular* (PP) did not have to deal with implementing the first set of austerity measures, thus obtaining an absolute majority in the 2011 elections. Throughout its term in office the PP bailed out banks and implemented important cuts in line with austerity policies. Despite experiencing a certain decline in support—also due its involvement in various corruption scandals being exposed—, the party remained the most voted one in the 2015 and 2016 general elections. The PP managed to form a minority government in 2016 which was eventually brought down by a vote of no confidence in 2018. From that moment on, its leader resigned and the party entered a succession race that electorally weakened it in the run-up to the two 2019 general elections.

## So what? Radical right's impact in Southern Europe

The authors found in this volume have also reflected on the consequences of these parties' growing relevance in southern Europe. The main impacts can be divided, on the one hand, into their effects on the political debate—and by extension, on political competition. On the other hand, in the influence they have had on public policies and actions by their respective governments. And furthermore, in southern European democracies' overall functioning, in line with what has also happened in other Western countries (Mudde, 2013).

In the years leading up to the Great Recession, political competition in most southern European countries was mainly articulated through the socio-economic cleavage manifesting itself through left-right divisions. In most countries this translates into competition dynamics designed to capture centrist voters (Lisi, 2019). Access to political representation (local, regional or national) by radical right parties has tended to be accompanied by a considerable national media attention

increase. These parties' provocative discourse has often had the capacity to condition public debate topics, and eventually place new frames by means of which to interpret reality. Some of the most controversial issues that these parties have tried to capitalize on have been connected to immigration, such as those relating to the refugee crisis caused by political instability in Northern Africa and Syria, or unaccompanied children's illegal immigration—often linked to jihadist terrorism. Furthermore, in the list of controversial issues capitalized by these parties we must include their criticisms of the pre-existing consensus on egalitarian public policies, which they discredited as a 'gender ideology' (Gallardo, in this volume). Again, the spread of these parties' ideas by conventional media has fed and escalated dynamics that had started years before the arrival of populist parties like *Podemos* and *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S) in countries like Spain or Italy. This has resulted in the inevitable polarization of public debate, which has also translated into new electoral competition dynamics: control over public agenda issues and debate frames, or rivalry in proposing simple and drastic solutions to complex problems. As Barrio has pointed out, as well as López and Borràs, in Spain a clear example of the aforementioned can be seen regarding *Vox*'s reaction to Catalan secessionism. PP and *Ciudadanos*' alignment with *Vox*'s maximalist positions became apparent in a 2019 demonstration in which all three parties protested against any kind of dialogue being carried out with secessionist parties. This demonstration served as an excuse for Pedro Sánchez's government to end the term and call elections.

However, these parties' influence on public policy processes in their respective countries seems less obvious. In fact, these parties' relevance in politics has been questioned even in more mature democracies which have experienced this political family's presence for a longer time (Mudde, 2013). As Kelbel & Lanzone have pointed out, FN's main influence on policies has been rather indirect, since it spurred a change within the moderate right regarding some of their approaches on law and order and immigration, especially during President Sarkozy's term. In Italy, scholars have traditionally been very skeptical about radical right's influence on Berlusconi's governments. Lately, there has been a tendency to believe that they were overshadowed by the moderate right, which led these parties' programmatic change towards neoliberal positions (Ruzza and Fella, 2009). On the other hand, Caiani and Carvalho did notice some effects derived from the initial 2018-2019 M5S-*Lega* government. On the one hand, the new government took an important turn away from austerity policies during their term, implementing a citizenship income and a pension system reform. On the other hand, migration policy—managed by *Lega*—acquired a clear nativist component, based around propaganda actions, but also on asylum rights restrictions. Emphasis on migration policy declined rapidly

when *Lega* left government. In Greece, Spain and Portugal these parties' relevance has been mitigated, since their access to institutions has run parallel to left-wing parties being in government (Halikiopoulou & Nanou, 2016; Jaráz, Cazorla & Pereira, 2021; Oliván, 2021). In the Spanish case, *Vox*'s influence has begun to be felt at the regional level. In regions whose right-wing governments are supported by the party (Andalusia, Madrid, Murcia), its priority has been to capitalize on dissatisfaction with egalitarian policies. So far its success has been more propagandistic than effective, mainly blocking regional budgets. The same can be said about the State of Autonomies' reform. Its electoral growth—and *Ciudadanos*' before that—seems to have mostly been successful in preventing the PP from ever considering reaching agreements with the PSOE on this issue.

Determining these parties' possible impact on political systems seems, however, a much harder task. From an institutional point of view *Lega* is the only party that has (fleeting)ly been in government. Therefore, its effects over the rule of law being undermined or in the promotion of illiberal practices, as was the case during Trump's term in the United States, has been marginal. It remains a slightly more controversial question whether these parties' influence has fostered what has come to be known as penal populism (Pratt, 2007). In Spain's case, *Vox*—like *Unión, Progreso y Democracia* before it—tried to play this card when it appeared as private prosecution in trials of special political significance, such as the one judging the events that took place in Catalonia during the fall of 2017. The party's actions during the trial gave it the chance to showcase its maximalist stance on Catalan secessionism while it was still in opposition, as well as to show public opinion its vigilance over public prosecutor's actions.

Finally, it must also be considered that, by participating in the democratic game, radical right parties may be contributing to contemporary liberal democracies' strengthening. They do so by incorporating into the democratic game citizens who previously may have felt unrepresented, uninterested in politics, or those who used to prefer violent forms of political participation. From this point of view, the fact that many of southern Europe radical right parties have stepped away from political violence could be considered a significant enough achievement. In the future, liberal-democratic institutions' task will obviously be to persuade these political parties and actors to respect the rule of law, separation of powers and ordinary political game. This is possibly the main challenge posed by radical right's growth during the current forth wave: turning parties that channel unsatisfied citizen demands into actors which are respectful of contemporary liberal democracies' procedures and principles.

## Conclusions

Building upon the different chapters that comprise this book, this text's aim has been to give a comparative overview on the radical right's political evolution in southern Europe. In order to do so, we have first examined the remarkable transformations experienced inside parties that had already been relevant in previous decades. The most important cases have been those of FN/RN in France and *Lega* in Italy, where changes have dealt with leadership, discourse or political strategies. However, new actors emerging in recent years, such as *Chega* in Portugal or *Vox* in Spain, have also been presented. With the exception of Golden Dawn, older parties have achieved more influential positions in their respective party systems, while new ones have thus far not been able to exceed the representation threshold.

In addition, this concluding chapter has examined both demand and supply factors that limited these parties' settlement during the previous decades, as well as those helping to understand their current growth. From the supply side, far-right parties' settlement difficulties have been caused due to citizens being refractory to the principles inspiring traditional radical right parties' discourses in southern Europe: they have distrusted past authoritarian legacies, immigration has played a secondary role in the political debate, and citizens have shown support for the European institutions. From the demand side, the importance of the socio-economic cleavage, electoral systems, traditional right-wing parties' political strategies, or nostalgic discourses have also been pointed out as obstacles hindering their access to institutions. Some of these elements have changed since the Great Recession. Austerity policies' effects on institutional trust, the growth of Euroscepticism, and immigration's growing relevance helped in providing a favorable environment for these parties. On the other hand, the aforementioned leadership or discourse changes in both new and old radical right parties, the changes in the cleavage structure and, above all, traditional right-wing parties' weakness in a context of important party system transformations, seem to be the key elements from the political supply perspective.

These parties' electoral projection certainly stems from their growing ability to influence the political debate and to change competitive dynamics. However, it remains controversial to assess their impact on the public policy process. At the moment their incidence seems to have been rather limited, even when in government—as was *Lega's* case. When considering their influence in a broader sense, it should be kept in mind that conventional right-wing parties have had to change some of their approaches (especially regarding law and order) in order to

counter radical right's growth. Finally, and the same holds true for the radical left, these parties have been able to integrate into the democratic game voters who would have not otherwise done so.

This last reflection leads us to consider, to conclude, some of the challenges faced by this new political family in southern Europe. First and most importantly is these parties ability to institutionalize. As Kelbel and Lanzone have pointed out in their chapter, it seems that RN/FN has managed to carry out part of this process since its leadership change, consolidating itself as the main right-wing alternative, although the party is still based on a strong personalist base. *Lega* has also successfully overcome charismatic leader Bossi's vanishment. However, it remains unclear whether *Lega* will be able to consolidate its leap into being Italian right's leading political force (Caiani & Carvalho, in this volume). In Greece, on the other hand, Golden Dawn's future seems more uncertain than ever after losing representation and being convicted by justice. Which of these two paths will parties in Spain and Portugal take? The answer will surely be related to their capacity (or lack thereof) to relocate in a post-pandemic world (Albertazzi, Bonansinga & Zulianello, 2021).

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# A message from Coppieters Foundation

Since its creation in 2007, the Coppieters Foundation has been developing new ideas and producing knowledge on recurring subjects in the European public debate. Those include self-determination, multilevel governance, geography, diversity, gender equality, migrations, economic development, peacebuilding and the protection of human and minority rights.

As a research centre, we have always strived for high quality books and policy papers which contribute new reflections and visions for an inclusive and sustainable Europe. Our publications benefit from the knowledge and experience of a wide range of contributors with diverse backgrounds and fields of expertise.

With this in mind, we released this publication, of which I am particularly proud because it represents a new and important contribution to European public policy debates. I am certain that it will have a significant impact on European policymakers, academics, activists and citizens.

I would like to thank and acknowledge the authors, editors and coordinators of this study for their excellent contribution to the Foundation's work. And I also thank you, the reader, for your interest in our projects.

Antonia Luciani  
Secretary-General of the Coppieters Foundation  
[www.ideasforeurope.eu](http://www.ideasforeurope.eu)

## The aims of the Coppieters Foundation

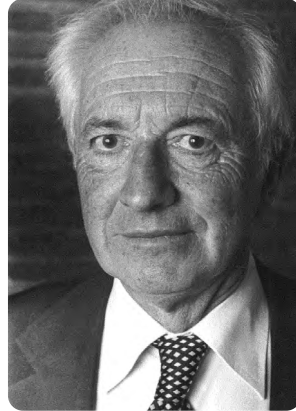
- To develop new ideas and produce knowledge on the management of cultural and linguistic diversity, collective rights, multilevel governance, decentralization, state and constitutional reform, statehood processes, self-determination, migration, conflict resolution, peace studies, and the protection of human rights in Europe;
- To raise awareness on issues of special interest for the foundation and its members;
- To influence decision-making process at the European level and create a legal framework that allows for an enhanced implementation of the principle of subsidiarity, the right to self-determination, better protection of diversity and minority rights, and a stronger respect for human rights in Europe;
- To drive the EU towards an alternative institutional structure that is more democratic, more respectful of collective rights and more aware of complex (multi-national and multi-cultural) realities of EU Member States;
- To play a role as a platform for dialogue between academia, European institutions (the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions) and other political actors;
- To transform scientific knowledge in the fields of political science, economy, sociology, philosophy and history into usable concepts for political action;
- To feed the European Free Alliance with politically relevant concepts, ideas, data, and knowledge, both in the institutional sphere and in EFA's action sphere outside European institutions.

Coppieters Foundation takes all necessary actions to promote and achieve the above stated goals by observing the principles on which the European Union is founded, namely the principles of democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

The geographical scope of the Coppieters Foundation is the European Union together with EU candidate and potential candidate countries. The partners of the organisation are based in 8 member states of the EU and active in 14 regions or stateless nations.

## Maurits Coppieters (Sint-Niklaas, 1920 – Deinze, 2005)

The Fleming Maurits Coppieters studied history and later became a Doctor of Laws and obtained a Master's degree in East European studies. During the Second World War, he refused to work for the German occupier. After many years as a teacher, he worked as a lawyer for a while. He was one of the people who re-established the Vlaamse Volksbeweging (Flemish People's Movement), of which he was the President from 1957-1963.



Coppieters' political career began when he became a member of the Flemish nationalist party Volksunie (VU), which was formed in 1954. With the exception of two years, Coppieters was a town councillor between 1964 and 1983. He was also elected as a member of the Belgian Chamber (1965-1971) and Senate (1971-1979). At the same time, Coppieters became President of the newly formed '*Cultuurraad voor de Nederlandstalige Cultuurgemeenschap*' (Cultural Council for the Dutch-speaking Community), from which the Flemish Parliament emerged, when the VU formed part of the government. In 1979, Coppieters was elected during the first direct elections for the European Parliament.

As a regionalist, he became a member of the Group for Technical Coordination and Defence of Independent Groupings and Members in the European Parliament (TCDI). Among other things, he made a name for himself when he championed the cause of the Corsicans. In the meantime, Coppieters also played a pioneering role in the formation of the European Free Alliance, of which he became the Honorary President and continued to play a role in its expansion, even after he said farewell to active politics in 1981. In 1996, Coppieters joined forces with the President of the Flemish Parliament, Norbert De Batselier, to promote 'Het Sienjaal', a project with a view to achieve political revival beyond the party boundaries. Coppieters died on November 11, 2005.

Among other things, Coppieters was the author of: '*Het jaar van de Klaproos*'; '*Ik was een Europees Parlements lid*'; '*De Schone en het Beest*'. He was an honorary member of the EFA.

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