Vox, a new old fashioned radical right in Spain

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Abstract

The rapid emergence of political party *Vox* on the stage of the European radical right and its consolidation as the third most voted political party in Spain has raised a debate about where to locate this political formation ideologically on the map of the European radical right. This article addresses this issue through a qualitative analysis of its party manifestos and discourse, and the revision of the winning formula theory formulated by Herbert Kitschelt. The research results demonstrate that *Vox* is a radical right party that fits the core features of the radical right family. Its political discourse and political proposal are based on a combination of nationalism articulated through the defence of the integrity of the Spanish Nation, authoritarian view of the society attached to the values of law and order, a defence of the traditional values and economic agenda with neoliberal component. All these factors make *Vox* a particular member of this party family within the European context. *Vox´*s political proposal, with authoritarian position in the political and neoliberal economy, distances it from the majority of the current radical right, which has abandoned the radical anti-statism of the eighties to adopt the so-called *Welfare Chauvinism*. *Vox´*s political project moves it closer to the position occupied during the eighties and nineties by radical right formations and the position currently occupied by the Portuguese party *Chega*, with whom *Vox* shares a similar political trajectory.

Keywords: *Vox*, radical right, winning formula theory, political discourse, political proposal, nationalism, authoritarianism, Welfare Chauvinism, Spain, Europe.

Vox, nowa staromodna radykalna prawica w Hiszpanii

Streszczenie

Nagłe pojawienie się partii politycznej *Vox* na scenie europejskiej radykalnej prawicy i jej konsoli-dacja jako trzeciej najczęściej wybieranej partii politycznej w Hiszpanii, wywołało debatę na temat tego, gdzie ideologicznie ulokować tę formację polityczną na mapie europejskiej radykalnej pra-

wicy. Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje tę kwestię poprzez jakościową analizę partyjnych manifestów i dyskursu oraz rewizję teorii formuł wygrywających Herberta Kitschelta. Wyniki badania pokazują, że *Vox* jest partią radykalnie prawicową, której profil pasuje do podstawowych cech rodziny radykalnie prawicowej. Dyskurs polityczny *Vox* i program polityczny opierają się na połączeniu nacjonalizmu wyrażonego poprzez obronę integralności narodu hiszpańskiego, autorytarny pogląd na społeczeństwo przywiązane do wartości prawa i porządku, obronę tradycyjnych wartości i program gospodarczy z wkomponowanym wyraźnym komponentem neoliberalnym. Czyni to *Vox* szczególnym członkiem rodziny prawicowych partii radykalnych w kontekście europejskim. Propozycja polityczna *Vox* opierająca się na autorytarnej pozycji w polityce i neoliberalnej ekonomii, różni ją od większości obecnej radykalnej prawicy, która porzuciła radykalny antyetatyzm lat osiemdziesiątych na rzecz tzw. *szowinizmu dobrobytu*. Polityczny projekt *Vox* zbliża ją do pozycji zajmowanej w latach osiemdziesiątych i dziewięćdziesiątych przez radykalnie prawicowe formacje oraz pozycji zajmowanej obecnie przez portugalską partię *Chega*, z którą *Vox* dzieli podobną trajektorię polityczną.

Słowa kluczowe: *Vox*, radykalna prawica, formuły zwycięstwa, dyskurs polityczny, program polityczny, nacjonalizm, autorytaryzm, szowinizm dobrobytu, Hiszpania, Europa.

Since the end of the seventies, Europe has witnessed the emergence of parties further to the right of the political spectrum, whose electoral success has aroused great interest among the scientific community, citizens and media journalists. In recent years, this "family" of political parties has increased its electoral success, as well as its participation in governments on the European continent. Radical right parties have representation in almost all national parliaments in Europe[1], they are part of the government in different countries, and in recent years they have increased their ability to influence the political agenda in national political systems (van Spanje 2011; Rooduijn et al. 2019; Mudde 2007; Ignazi 2003; Kitschelt, McGann 1997; Miecznikowska 2016; Antoszewski 2018; Kinyakin et al. 2021).

In this context, however, Spain has been until recently one of the few European countries without a relevant radical right political force. While radical right parties have become increasingly common across European societies, Spain seemed immune to this trend (Alonso, Rovira Kaltwasser 2015). However, this situation ended with the 2018 regional election in Andalusia, where *Vox* gained 11% of the vote and 12 seats, bringing this exceptionalism to an end (Turnbull-Dugarte 2019).

Vox's rapid rise and consolidation in the Spanish political scenario have raised numerous debates around its ideological nature. This article aims to elucidate *Vox*'s ideological nature, identifying those attitudes and discursive elements that it shares with other radical right formations to locate it on the map of the European radical right. Under these circumstances, three questions arise: where is *Vox* located on the map of the European radical right? At what point is it located within its ideological evolution? And, finally, which formation of the European radical right does it most resemble?

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[1] Ireland, United Kingdom, Iceland and Luxemburg are the unique exceptions.

Methodologically, this article takes the form of a case study. The objective is to identify and analyse the ideological core of the party studied, compare it with the rest of the radical right formations, and know in what ideological position *Vox* is on the map of the European radical right. Regarding the methods used, these are based on a qualitative analysis of secondary data, including a review of specialised literature on the field of study and research of *Vox´*s political manifestos: *100 medidas para la España viva* (see: *Vox* 2018) and *Agenda España* (see: *Vox* 2021). Furthermore, to capture the ideological position of the political parties of the European radical right and locate them on the map of the European radical right, it has used the Comparative Manifesto project and the 2019 Chapel Hill expert survey.

The article is organised as follows: the first section begins with a brief historical journey of *Vox*, from its emergence in 2013 to its current consolidation in the Spanish political scene. The following section addresses the theoretical framework, with a profuse literary review of the radical right and its evolution, through the revision of the winning formula theory of Herbert Kitschelt and McGann (see: Kitschelt, McGann 1997). The ideological components of *Vox* are then presented. The fifth section compares *Vox* and the rest of the European radical right formations on the current European radical right map. Finally, the article ends with a summary and pertinent conclusion that aspire to open some research lines in the future.

Background: *Vox*, the institutionalisation of the radical right in the Spanish political system

Vox was founded in December 2013 due to an internal split from the mainstream right-wing party, the *People's Party* (span. *Partido Popular*), with the participation of some of its former more conservative cadres. Close to former president José María Aznar, they criticised Mariano Rajoy's PP, Spain's president of the government at that time, for being too moderate on issues such as traditional values or economic freedom (Ferreira 2019) and for its indecisive attitude towards the Catalan question (Rubio-Pueyo 2019).

Claiming to be to the right of the People's Party and avoiding oneself on the side of the far-right (Ferreira 2019), the first promoters of *Vox* were grouped around the figure of Alejo Vidal Quadras. He is the former president of the *People's Party* of Catalonia and a member of its most conservative wing, to run in the European elections of May 2014 (Rubio-Pueyo 2019). The new political formation was only 2000 voters away from winning a seat. A few months later, Vidal Quadras left the party to avoid further fragmentation of the right-wing vote in the face of the rise of Podemos. Lately, Santiago Abascal, former Basque parliamentarian and current party's leader, was elected president.

Under Abascal's leadership, *Vox* has run in every election contest that has taken place, but did not achieve any success until the Andalusian autonomic elections of December 2018 – see Figure 1 (Ferreira 2019). Spurred on by the Catalan secessionist crisis, *Vox* has taken advantage of it to enter the institutional arena, getting more than 10% of the votes and up to twelve seats in the Andalusian Parliament. Since then, *Vox* has become

the third political force in Spain's National Congress. It has supported the formation of several PP-led governments at the regional level. For the first time since its formation, it has governed in a coalition with the *People´s Party* in Castilla y León.

The irruption and consolidation of *Vox* in the Spanish political system suppose a political change that is not negligible. Never before had a radically right-wing political force achieved such electoral consolidation. Spain, which had been immune to the growth of radical right-wing political parties despite the turbulent crisis, was an exception (Payá, Diaz Martínez 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte 2019; vanderWilden 2020) in a European political context increasingly influenced by this family of political parties. *Vox* has managed to end this exceptionalism, and its political proposal introduces new political discourses and a new political agenda (Anduiza 2018)[2].

Figure 1. *Vox´s* electoral results since its foundation

Year	Elections	Votes	Percentage (%)	Seats
2014	Europeans	244.929	1, 56	0/54
2015	Municipals	64.385	0,29	22[2]/67.515
2015	Regionals (10 autonomous communities)	75.486	0,62	0/620
2015	Generals	58.114	0,23	0/350
2016	Generals	47.182	0,20	0/350
2018	Regionals (Andalusia)	395.978	10,97	12/109
2019	Generals	2.644.325	10,26	24/350
2019	Europeans	1.338.681	6,20	3/54
2019	Regionals (15 autonomous communities)	963.259	7,42	45/886
2019	Municipals	659.736	2,90	530/66.787
2019	Generals	3.656. 979	15,08	52/350
2021	Regionals (Catalonia)	217.883	7,69	11/135
2021	Regionals (Madrid)	333.403	9,15	13/136
2022	Regionals (Castilla y León)	212.605	17,64	13/81

Source: Own elaboration based on Ministry of Interior data (2014–2021)

Theoretical framework: radical right´s conceptualisation

The appearance, and subsequent consolidation, in a considerable number of European countries of formations that present certain similarities in terms of their ideology and political style, has led to the need to find a word that adequately defines and describes this phenomenon. The research on this phenomenon has been marked by very different ideas, causing the emergence of a terminological debate.

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[2] In coalition with the party *Life and Family*

Different terminology has been used to refer to the object of study. The various experts in political science, historians, social researchers, and journalists have used additional terms to designate political formations located to the right to the mainstream right. Thus, to name these parties it has been used labels such as anti-immigrants, nativism, reactionary tribalism, ethnonationalism, extreme right, far right, new right, and a series of combinations of the words "radical", "right" and "populism" (e.g., the populist radical right, the radical right, radical right-wing populism, right-wing populism) or variation on the latter term (e.g., exclusionary populism, national populism, neopopulism, new populism, xenophobic populism) (Mudde 2007; de Lange 2008: p. 59–60).

Using these expressions to name them does not mean understanding all these parties politically but would only define a part of them. For this reason, any reductionist terminology of the investigated phenomenon must be rejected (Lerín Ibarra 2019). On the other hand, to define these parties, the concepts alluding to fascism must be discarded (such as fascist, neo-fascist, Nazis or neo-Nazis). Nowadays, it is easy to find statements in the press and social networks, where some leader or other radical right party is branded as fascist. Even in political debates or electoral campaigns, the accusation of fascism is even more present. Fascism is a concept that has been emptied of meaning in recent years, and as it states, Jason Stanley, in his book *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (see: Stanley 2018), has become an insult rather. Unlike journalism or the world of politics, academia could state a certain consensus to differentiate between the interwar fascism or neo-fascism of the post-war period of today´s far-right. Fascism was a political phenomenon born at the end of the First World War in Italy *(it. 1919 Fasci di Combattimento),* and it lived its apogee in the following two decades throughout the European continent: it was replicated in its radical version in National Socialist Germany. It was imitated by other authoritarian regimes, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe.

After World War II, the fascist dream was interrupted; however, it did not entirely disappear. It has gradually transformed into a new phenomenon in emerging democracies: neo-fascism[3]. Under the denomination or the label "neo-fascism", integrated the small group of fascists who had managed to survive World War II and a younger generation of political activists who were determined to play a more prominent role in the far-right camp. Despite the de- Nazification processes, the fascist residues were not completely eradicated. They have been reorganised into new parties such as the Italian Social Movement, the Socialist Reich Party and the German Reich Party. However, the neo-fascists were nostalgic for the loss of the inter-war period. For the most part, they abandoned the fascist paraphernalia and adapted to the new international situation (Olascoaga 2018).

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[3] Neo-fascism has been described by Andrea Mammone (2015) as "a philosophical movement that […] combines a sense of crisis and national decline, a fascination with a glorious past, a process of historical revisionism […], a critique of parliamentary processes […], the need for a strong state, a strict rule of law system, growth with respect to European superiority together with an almost complete rejection of the so-called ´others´[…], a nationalism that combined […] the defence of traditional values, the justification of violence […] and possibly a charismatic leader". Neo-fascism was the denomination used during the first decades of post-war period, roughly from 1945 till 1980, by the vast majority of scholars – historians and experts of historical fascism, who studied the post-war far right.

The expression "extreme right" had been, until recent times, the dominant nomenclature accepted by a large number of scholars to designate these political parties that shared a common ideological core (i.e., nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and the strong state); even though the absence of a consensus on the exact definition (Mudde 1996). Classic works of von Beyme (1988), Ignazi (1992, 2003), Mudde (1996), and Carter (2005) contributed to extending the label of an extremist for a supposed family of parties to the right of the established Conservative and Christian Democrats, even if their exact relationship with democracy was less clear-cut than the level extreme would suggest (Arzheimer 2019).

However, around the same time, two monographs that had a substantial impact on the further development of the field were published: Hans-George Betz's *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (see: Betz 1994) and second book by Herbert Kitschelt and Anthony McGann *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Kitschelt, McGann 1997). Being influenced by Daniel Bell´s classic monograph on the radical right in the USA (Bell 1963), the authors "highlighted the internal diversity of the party family and how at least some of its members differed from traditional right-wing extremists. These monographs signify the emergence of a second stream in the literature that emphasises the relative newness of the parties under study" (Arzheimer 2019). Nevertheless, the publication of Cas Mudde's monograph *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (see: Mudde 2007) marked a turning point in this field of study. Despite that, Mudde had been one of the most nuanced and thoughtful proponents of the expression "Extreme Right" in the first chapter of his new book, he pointed out that extreme right political parties were alongside the radical right, a subgroup of the broad family of the "Far Right".

On the one hand, the radical right accepts the essence of democracy. Still, it "opposes fundamental elements of liberal democracy, most notably minority rights, the rule of law, and the separation of powers" (Mudde 2019: p. 7). Conversely, the extreme right rejects the essence of democracy, that is, popular sovereignty and majority rule. Currently, the most popularised statement to label this party family of new political parties is that of "Populist Radical Right", a term coined by Cas Mudde and assumed by many other authors such as Sarah de Lange (2008), Pippa Norris (2005), Tjiske Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn (2016), Antón Mellón, Hernández-Carr (2016), etc. Nevertheless, some social researchers also use "extreme right" to analyse the current radical right formations. Still, most political science does not use this expression to define these new political forces.

In this article, the concept of radical right will be used to identify the political parties that are located to the right of the mainstream right, formed by the Conservatives, Christian Democratic and Liberal Parties, and which share three ideological features: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (see: Mudde 2007).

Nativism is an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to homogenous nation-state (Mudde 2007; Rama et al. 2021). *Vox* expresses a nativist ideology based on the fight against internal enemies – peripheral nationalism and political parties, and organisations that pursue the

destruction of the territorial unity of the Nation and its sovereignty and external enemies (immigrants, predominantly Muslim population) to get a mono-national State.

Authoritarianism is the second nuclear feature that defines radical right. Authoritarianism is "the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely" (Mudde 2007: p. 23). In the model of society defended by *Vox*, authoritarianism is present concerning the state's position regarding policies such as the protection of the territory, the fight against crime and discipline in the education system, etc.

Finally, populism is the third ideological feature of the radical right parties. Populism has become one of the buzzwords of this century and, to some extent, is still a contested concept. In contemporary literature, there are different approaches to defining populism: ideology, strategy, discursive or political style. However, populism, either considered as ideology, strategy, discourse, or political style, appeals to two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the people and elite. The concept of "people" is idealised, constituted by a group of ordinary citizens possessing an innate, fair, and wise common sense that they cannot employ due to the corruption of the elites. Because of this situation, the people must seize power, and, with it, all social problems will disappear. Hovever, analysing *Vox*'s discourse as it will be done next, the populist content is relatively scarce. There are no explicit appeals to the people as a subject in *Vox* discourse beyond the references to "Spain" or an identified elite (Anduiza 2018).

The theory of winning formulas and its application to the European radical right

The political scientist Herbert Kitschelt observed that during the seventies and eighties, the large traditional Western European parties underwent an ideological transformation in their political offer towards the centre, both on economic issues and on issues related to the values (Kitschelt, McGann 1997). The tremendous social democratic and Christian democratic parties had left a free space to their left, occupied from the eighties by the new green parties and the alternative left, and to their right, by the unique formations of the radical right. The radical right formations that burst into the European political scene of the seventies and eighties did so with an unequivocally neoliberal and authoritarian plane of values. The National Front of Jean Marie Le Pen, the FPÖ of Jörg Haider, the Lega Lombarda of Umberto Bossi and the Flemish Vlaams Blok were clear examples of this political offer is markedly neoliberal in the economic and authoritarian in terms of values (Fernández-Vázquez 2019).

This wave of radical right parties based its entry into the political arena by 1) choosing a limited number of thematic axes on which to support its programme, particularly the security-identity-immigration triad, and 2) identifying very precisely the enemies that they wanted to combat: taxation, immigration, the cultural left, and traditional parties (Sánchez-Iglesias et al. 2021).

However, during the 1990s, some radical right formations introduced new elements into their political offer, with the attenuation of the neoliberal component being the most

characteristic change. In fact, in the article *The Radical Right in the Alps: Evolution of Support for the Swiss SVP and Austrian FPÖ* published in 2005, Kitschelt developed the idea of a new winning formula, which maintains the authoritarian dimension in the aspect of values, but modifies its economic dimension, defending what has been called *Welfare Chauvinism* (see: McGann, Kitschelt 2005). Supporters of *Welfare Chauvinism* argue that state social benefits should be directed at natives, and those not part of the native group should not receive them.

The "second winning formula" would suppose an adaptation to the liberal drift of the economics programmes of the main left parties and the consensus between right and left on immigration and multiculturalism. Therefore, the new winning formula would share with the first the gesture of founding an open, attractive political space coupled with the ideological evolution of the centre-left and the centre-right. It would also involve an attempt to adapt the political offer of the radical right to the growing worker's vote in its favour (Sánchez-Iglesias et al. 2021). This new winning formula or second winning formula applies to the ideological shift experienced by the main parties of the European radical right, such as the Flemish Vlaams Belang, the Italian Northern League, the French National Front, the Austrian FPÖ, or the Swiss SVP, as well as to the formations of the radical right of the Nordic countries (Fernández-Vázquez 2019).

Vox's ideological discourse: an analysis of *Vox´s* political agenda

Vox's political project is associated with five thematic axes: The defence of the integrity of the Spanish Nation and its enemies, the security of an authoritarian model of society based on law and order, immigration, the protection of the traditional values, and the commitment to a neoliberal economic agenda.

Defence of the integrity of the Spanish Nation

The topic of the Spanish Nation resonates strongly in *Vox*'s political discourse and its political manifestos. *Vox* is articulated as a political instrument of the defence and at the service of the Spanish Nation. It supports a mono-national, robust and decentralised state, and points as enemies to peripheral nationalism[4] and to political parties and organisations that pursue the destruction of the territorial unity of the Nation and its sovereignty, whom it threatens, respectively, with the immediate suppression of autonomy and its de-legalisation (Vox 2021).

Concurrently, the party aims to provide more excellent legal protection to the national symbols: The Flag, the Anthem, and the Crown, and calls for "increased penalties for offences and outrages against Spain and its symbols" (Vox 2021).

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[4]　Spain is a high decentralised country with 17 regions, the so-called autonomous communities (span. *Comunidades Autónomas*), and two autonomous cities (Melilla and Ceuta) in the North African territory. "Each one of these regions features distinct cultural traits that, in most cases, somehow overlap with the Spanish cultural tradition. For example, in regions such as Galicia, Catalonia, the Valencian Community, the Balearic Islands, the Basque Country, and Navarre, many people speak local languages, which are constitutionally recognised as co-official state languages." (Rama et al. 2021: p. 46).

Another steppingstone for the defence of Spanish unity is protecting the national language. The support for Spanish as a national language to the detriment of Catalan, Galician or Basque also appears frequently in their proposals: "we need to comply with the constitutional mandate that all Spaniards have the right to use Spanish language, and the duty to know it" (Vox 2021). Then again, *Vox* finds it necessary to "guarantee the right to be educated in Spanish throughout the national territory. Spanish should be a compulsory vehicle language, and co-official language should be optional. Parents should have the right to choose their children's language in school" (Rama et al. 2021).

A core element of this exaltation of national sentiment and its conception of Spanishness is the appeal to a whole series of historical milestones and deeds of the Nation, presented as a source of pride and identification (Rodríguez 2021). *Vox* claims a conception of the Spanish based on episodes and characters of the Reconquista ("Reconquest") against Muslims in the Middle Ages, the discovery of America, and the period of the imperial Spain of the Habsburg projected in an evident way towards the present. These references, particularly to the Reconquista, allow an implicit projection of a nativist discourse, defending the ethnic homogeneity of the country (Rodríguez 2021).

Law and order: defence of authoritarian model of society

Radical right political parties express in their discourse authoritarianism (Mudde 2019) through policy proposals related to law and order (Alonso, Rovira Kaltwasser 2015). "Every political issue is perceived through the lens of a threat to the natural order, creating insecurity, which has to be dealt with an iron hand" (Mudde 2019: p. 33). In this respect, *Vox* does not constitute an exception since a model of society based on law and order is present in most of its political positions.

A large part of its measures are based on hardening penalties against illegal immigration, such as the immediate expulsion of all the immigrants who enter Spain illegally and who commit serious crimes (Vox 2021); and the restoration of life imprisonment for the most severe crimes (Vox 2018).

The property right underlines the importance that "every Spaniard must have the ability to defend himself and his own in the face of aggression in his own home" (Vox 2021). And it is intransigent with squatting "must be expelled within hours from the dwellings where they have entered" (Vox 2018). Similarly, in the case of immigration, as will be discussed in the following subsection, it also focuses on an authoritarian and strong state position: "military deployment on the borders of Ceuta, Melilla and the Canary Islands to guarantee the protection of these territories" and "to guarantee the police presence in all the streets and all the neighbourhoods of Spain making it impossible to create ghettos, where the rule of law disappears, and Islamic law is imposed" (Vox 2021).

Beyond the fight against crime, authoritarian morality is also present in various fields of public policy, such as the education system. It defends a model that can thrive with effort, merit, and discipline (Ferreira 2019). And for that purpose, the party proposes that "parents must recover their legitimate authority" and "the recovery of the prestige and authority of teaching staff" (Vox 2021).

Immigration

Vox is entirely opposed to illegal immigration and demands that "immigration must be legal, and that immigrants must integrate, come to work and comply with legal re-quirements" (Vox 2018). Although it affirms that immigration is a necessary phenomenon, the party underlines that "immigration will be addressed taking into account the needs of the Spanish economy and the immigrant's capacity for integration. Origin quotas will be established, privileging nationalities that share a language and important ties and culture with Spain" (Vox 2018; Rama et al. 2021: p. 48–49).

Vox's discourse on immigration presents a positive ethnic differentiation favouring the Latin American population for ethnic-cultural reasons such as language, culture, his-tory, and social and cultural identity (Cheddadi, León 2022). On the contrary, it presents a negative ethnic differentiation against the Maghreb or Islamic ethnicity. It cannot adapt to the Spanish socio-economic structure due to its ethnic origin (Vox 2018). In addition, the xenophobic component is explicitly present in its proposals, especially against the Muslim population. The party demands "to those responsible for the Islamic religion in Spain an absolute collaboration for the arrest of radicals, and the exclusion from the teaching of Islamic in public schools" (Vox 2018). It also demands "the closure of funda-mentalist mosques and the expulsion of Imams who propagate fundamentalism, disdain for women, or jihad" and also rejects that "third countries finance mosques" (Vox 2018).

The criminalisation of foreign unaccompanied minors (MENAs[5]) is another element of the migration discourse of *Vox*. This party points out that the "MENAs" appropriate public resources that do not correspond to them, to the detriment of the local population, for which there is barely social protection, pointing them as a social and urban security problem (Cheddadi 2020).

The combination of an essentialist conception of the Nation, such as the idea of Spain and the defence of the Spanish Nation, together with the protection of security and na-tional identity and a xenophobic stance against immigrants, especially against Muslims, make *Vox* a nativist organisation (Ferreira 2019).

Protection of traditional values

The defence of traditional values through antifeminist and anti-LGTBI rhetoric and discourse in defence of life, family, tradition, and the rural world occupy a central role in *Vox´*s political discourse.

Vox has developed an active strategy of differentiation from other political formations regarding gender equality to dismantle the essential components of policies in this area. The "immediate repeal of the Gender Violence Law" (Vox 2018) and its replacement by a domestic violence law, or the abolition of specialised agencies such as women´s insti-tutes, are clear examples. On the contrary, the party is committed to policies focused on

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5   These are foreigners under eighteen years of age, arrived in Spanish territory without being accompa-nied by any adult responsible for them, either legally or in accordance with custom, appreciating the risk of lack of protection of the minor, while said responsible adult has not effectively taken care of the minor, as well as any foreign minor, who is ever in that situation in Spain (Real Decreto 557/2011).

supporting the family, which is described as "the basic unity of our society and space of freedom" (Vox 2021) and on increasing the birth rate, through advanced direct aid for the number of children, tax credits for large families or loans to young couples with children (Vox 2021).

The defence of the culture of life is another crucial element in *Vox´s* discourse and points out that "abortion and euthanasia violate the basic principles of life"; therefore, its laws must be repealed (Vox 2021). On the other hand, this political proposal also presents the defence of traditions. *Vox* considers it vitally important to defend the rural world and its popular practices – such as hunting or bullfighting – against progressive and globalist attacks (Vox 2021).

Economic agenda

Vox presents a neoliberal agenda in economic terms and much more liberal discourse than other radical right parties. The tax cut, free-market defence, personal freedom defence and private property defence are de main axes of *Vox*'s economic policy.

The political party advocates a "drastic reduction in political spending and the suppression of the suppression of the autonomous system" and bets on a "massive tax cut" (Vox 2021). It defends the "suppression of the Wealth-tax, Inheritance and Donation tax, the reduction of the Income Tax and the reduction of Corporate Tax" (Vox 2021). It also bets on typical proposals of the neoliberal right, such as the implantation of the school voucher.

The recent presentation of *Agenda España* (Vox 2021), a package of aggressive measures with the Spanish government's 2030 Agenda, shows a slight intention of the electoral overflow to left positions to achieve certain transversality. The new political manifesto advocates strengthening the Welfare State, increasing investment in Health, Education, Dependency, Pensions, and Infrastructure through the reduction of political spending (Vox 2021). The assistance to Spaniards in a situation of vulnerability, the provision of economic resources for those who cannot study, the strengthening of the health care system and the national priority in social aid are political measures guided only to natives. They are part of the so-called *Welfare Chauvinism*.

Vox in the map of the European radical right

Vox has played a leading role in the last five years as one of the most spectacular irruptions of the panorama of the European radical right. However, *Vox* does not introduce any able innovations within the ideological corpus of the European radical right. Its rhetoric and political programme represent rather a setback of several decades with respect for the way, in which the main forces of the European radical right are located on the political chessboard.

Vox presented itself as a political instrument for the defense of the Spanish Nation against those, who pursue the destruction of the territorial unity of the Nation and its sovereignty in a context of a territorial crisis and weakness of the main right political

party: *People´s Party* (PP). Nevertheless, with the aim of locating *Vox* on the map of the European radical right, it is essential to study the elements that relate *Vox* to the rest of the European radical right parties.

Firstly, *Vox* shares with other European radical right parties the fact of refusing to define themselves as far right or radical righ parties. For instance, when *Vox* is singled out or accused of being a far-right party, Santiago Abascal, founder and leader of *Vox*, rejects that his party is far-right, if not of extreme necessity.

Secondly, *Vox* also shares with the parties of this ideological family the fact of having emerged politically as what the political scientist Bonnie M. Meguid (2007) defines as "niche-party": 1) formations that rejects the orientation of politics based on social class, 2) insert within the political debate issues that were outside the public discussion, 3) circumscribe the bulk of their communicative activity to that limited number of topics.

Vox has penetrated the Spanish political scene as a political instrument for the defence of the Spanish Nation, as did other radical right-wing parties such as the French *National Front* or the Italian *Lega Lombarda* during the eighties.

Moreover, in relation to the character of niche party, *Vox* shares with the main formation of the European radical right: the will to generate amazement with its political communication. That is, provocation as a political tactic. With a series of main objectives: to enjoy a constant presence in the media; to set the political agenda and condition the public debate; to give cultural battle to the left.

An example of this is the strategy adopted by Abascal´s formation in the electoral campaign of April 2019 about the possibility that Spaniards could have a weapon for self-defence (Forti 2021) or the poster placed, during the electoral campaign of the Community of Madrid in the train station of Sol in Madrid, in which the monthly cost of an unaccompanied foreign minor was compared with the pension received by the elderly. Through this strategy, *Vox* gained media attention, conditioning the political debate since, for a while, there was no talk of anything else and enjoyed a constant presence in the media.

Finally, another element *Vox* shares with the European radical right is the central character of security. Punitivism, the narrative in which public insecurity has become a severe problem, is one of the favourite frames of the radical right, who accuses the immigrant population as responsible for the rise of crime in societies. Hence, *Vox* is betting on strengthening the borders and building a wall in the Autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla or suspending the Schengen Area so that criminals cannot use it to flee from justice (Vox 2018).

However, despite the parallels in the rhetoric and staging of these political formations, within the political parties that are part of the wave of radical right haunting Europe for about a decade, very different attitudes or political positions can be found.

In general, radical right parties tend to have the same ideological policies and strategies on immigration, as noted above, but they advocate very different policies in socio-economic matters and in terms of values.

Parties such as *National Front*, currently *National Rally*, FPÖ, *Northern League,* or the Nordics parties such as the *Progress Party* (Norway), *Democrats* (Sweden), or *People's*

Party (Dania), have experienced a vital moderation of their right-wing proposals and a more remarkable ideological shift towards a more progressive model in the economic field.

Nevertheless, not all radical right formations, between the last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first century, have shifted towards the left in economic issues. As observed above, *Vox*'s economic proposal can be summarised by the commitment to deregulatory measures under the rhetoric of increasing freedom and individual decision-making power. Even more radical is the economic programme of the Portuguese party *Chega*, whose proposals focus on privatisation, deregulation, and fiscal reforms and promotes a general withdrawal of the state from all economic activity, except that of regulation and arbitration. Also, the budgetary field defends a flat income tax, eliminating the municipal tax on real estate or reinforcement of VAT, and reform focused on tax reduction for companies, inheritances, and immovable properties (Chega! 2019). Similarly, *Brothers of Italy* (it. *Fratelli d'Italia*) maintains an economic stance like that of *Vox* and *Chega* and advocates a drastic reduction in taxes, positioning itself in favour of the introduction of a single tax, public spending, and the role of the state in those areas considered as non-essential (Fratelli d'Italia 2017).

Beyond these two extremes, that of Welfare Chauvinism and that of ultra or neoliberalism, other radical right parties offer varied approaches to economic discourse. Parties such as the Belgian *Vlaams Belang*, the Swiss *People's Party*, the Polish *Law and Justice* (PiS) or Orban's Fidesz are neoliberal in some issues and interventionist in others.

The Polish party *Law and Justice* (PiS), for instance, proposes a tax system of only two tranches, a proposal that *Vox* offers to a large extent in Spain. Still, unlike *Vox, PiS* is committed to an active economic policy on the part of the state and to introducing social welfare programmes such as an hourly minimum wage or financial support to families with two or more children (Rydliński 2018).

Regarding the issue of the values, all radical right formations defend a general conservatism. However, it is possible to observe a few nuances in the positions adopted, such as abortion, gender equality, the family, or the rights of the LGBT collective. Each country's culture and political traditions influence how these parties address these issues (Forti 2021).

For the last years, there has been a particular shift in some of this formation regarding the rights of the LGBT community. Some formations have abandoned the fierce opposition maintained in the past. Today, they defend the LGBT community as a community threatened by the same threats as the rest of the nation. The *Party for Freedom* in the Netherlands, the Belgian *Vlaams Belang* and the French *National Front* are well-documented examples of this ideological transformation. On the contrary, Central European radical rights are less tolerant of the LGBT community. In Poland, PiS rejects the demands made by LGBT minorities and see these as the manifestation of social demoralisation, which causes problems in many areas of social life (Folvarčný, Kopeček 2020). And in Hungary, everything that departs from the original conception of family is understood as a deviation.

On the question of gender, it is possible to perform a similar reading. Even though many of the radical right formations are represented by women such as Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni (FdI), Alice Weidel (AfD), Rocio Monasterio, or Macarena Olona (Vox), they define antifeminist and sometimes misogynistic policies. By instrumentalising gender and sexual diversity issues, radical right parties seek to legitimise or cover up their most disruptive racist proposals (Alabao 2020).

Vox maintains a similar position to that of the rest of the radical right parties regarding the conception of the family and describes as a threat everything that moves away from the original concept of the "natural family". In case of the rights of LGBT people, it impacts away from the "progressive" position defended by parties such as RN, VB, PVV or the Nordic parties. And it moves away from the radical position protected by PiS and Orban's *Fidesz*.

Therefore, where *Vox* would be found within this heterogeneous panorama of Nordic versions, classic formations in transformation such as the French National Rally or the Italian League or the transformed conservative parties such as Fidesz or the Polish PiS?

Examining *Vox*'s rhetoric in light of the theory of winning formula presented by Herbert Kitschelt allows us to situate *Vox*'s political proposal within the first winning formula and link Santiago Abascal's formation with the political parties of the "first golden age" of the radical right. In this sense, *Vox* is assimilable from its ideology, staging, and political communication to the radical right formations of the eighties and nineties (Fernández-Vázquez 2019). In its first years of life, *Vox* has not been able to adapt to the dominant model of the current European radical right. The political proposal of *Vox*, unlike that of the other European radical right formations, does not intent to find a political space between the right or the left. It has preferred to articulate itself as a nationalist and identitarian political formation, with clearly authoritarian positions in the political and neoliberal economy, and as a bastion that counteracts the left's cultural dominance and mobilises a large part of the conservative electorate.

Currently, there is no political formation in the European radical right map identical to another. Each political formation defends a specific position or attitude given that the context and political traditions of each country influencing how these political parties articulate their political discourse. In general, if we try to find a European counterpart for *Vox*, we could not look for it in the current *National Rally* of Marine Le Pen, in Salvini's *Lega*, nor in the Nordic parties of the radical right that already maintain more progressive positions in the economy and less conservative in the cultural one.

The radical right formation that would come closest to *Vox* would be the Portuguese party *Chega*. Both formations have managed to break with the exceptionalism that characterised Portugal and Spain of being immune to radical right parties, in addition, to sharing a similar trajectory and ideological positions. Since their transition to democracy in the 1970s, Spain and Portugal had been 'immune' to the radical right. However, between 2018 and 2019, Iberian exceptionalism ended almost identical. "For the first time since the end of the authoritarian regimes of Francisco Franco and António Salazar, populist radical right parties obtained representation in the political systems of the two Iberian countries" (Heyne, Manucci 2021).

Parties *Chega* and *Vox* also share a similar political trajectory: they come from a split of the mainstream right among their countries, and their leaders share a similar political course. Santiago Abascal, current leader of *Vox*, was a city councilor of Basque Parliament representing the *People´s Party* (PP) until he resigned and created *Vox* in 2013. Similarly, André Ventura was a member of the *Social Democratic Party* (PSD) and in 2018 he resigned and founded *Chega* in 2019.

Similarly, both formations share some ideological positions. Both *Chega* and *Vox* focus on crime and security, and law and order, proposing an uncompromising vision of the society, which insists on the defence of the traditional family and traditional gender norms and opposes feminism. Moreover, both formations share a nativist component, although slightly different "because Roma communities are *Chega's* main target, while *Vox* is against migrants in general and Muslim ones in particular" (Heyne, Manucci 2021). Finally, both share a neoliberal economic agenda focused on privatisation, deregulation, and tax reduction; and both fight against a common enemy: socialism, represented by Pedro Sanchez's government in Spain and António Costa's government in Portugal.

Conclusions

This article makes a systematic analysis of *Vox*'s political agenda, situating it within the scholar literature and the discourse of the radical right. By drawing on a range of primary sources, *Vox´s* political manifestos, the article provides an evaluation of the *Vox´s* ideological discourse with the aim to classify it on the map of the European radical and to carry out a comparative study with other radical right formations.

Vox´s political discourse, despite the natural contextual specifices, is similar to that other radical right parties, sharing with them a nativist and authoritarian output. Unlike other European radical right formations, to date, *Vox´s* political strategy has not worked to build transversal majorites. In its first years of life, *Vox* has failed to adapt to the dominant model of the current European radical right formations. It has preferred to articulate itself as a nationalist and identitarian formation, gain the battle of ideas within the ideological space of the right, and articulate itself as a bastion that counteracts the left's cultural dominance and mobilises much of the conservative electorate.

Relying on Kitschelt´s winning formula theory (Kitschelt, McGann 1997), *Vox´s* political proposal could be situated within the first winning formula, given that the formation led by Santiago Abascal preferred to follow the coordinates followed by the radical right in the eighties and nineties. Hence its characterisation of "old-fashioned".

Nevertheless, in recent years, *Vox* has tried to broaden his electorate by winking at different social groups as his European counterparts have done through his public interventions. The creation of the Solidaridad trade union, the presentation of the political manifesto Agenda España, with particular rhetoric and gestures towards the working class, or the working class discourse deployed in the humble neighbourhoods of Madrid during the last electoral campaign; raises the question of whether *Vox*, little by little, has been modifying its political strategy.

Further research could try to answer this question and study whether *Vox* in the times has initiated a process of "lepenisation", imitating the ideological shift that some of its European counterparts have made.

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