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Ending the Spanish Exception: Explaining the Rise of Vox

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Ending the Spanish Exception

Explaining the Rise of Vox

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Honors Thesis in Government

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Abstract

The “Spanish Exception” refers to Spain’s lack, until recently, of a populist right-wing party. Vox became the first party to the right of the conservative PP to win seats in a regional election in 2018 and in general elections in April and November of 2019. Vox is currently the third largest political party in the Spanish parliament, bringing an end to Spanish exceptionalism. This thesis addresses the rise of Vox through a conceptual framework of political opportunity structure. The framework allows for multiple explanations to account for Vox’s sudden breakthrough. I argue that opportunities present in 2018 and 2019 at institutional, party system, and voter behavior levels combined to create a favorable moment for a right-wing populist party to gain electoral success in a country once thought to be immune from such parties. Given the recentness of Vox’s electoral success, this thesis adds a new case to the vast body of literature that addresses right-wing populist successes. Furthermore, it expands on explanations for such successes developed over the previous forty years of right-wing scholarship.

Keywords

Vox, Spain, populist right-wing, political opportunity

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Part I

This thesis seeks to address the question of why the Spanish party landscape has recently undergone a change. The Spanish exception, which used to refer to Spain's lack of a right-wing populist party, has ended with the electoral success of Vox. Before explaining *why* Vox was successful, Part I explores and describes the Spanish and European contexts for this change.

In Chapter 1, I describe the Spanish exception and the reasons that scholars and politicians have offered for the absence of a right-wing populist party throughout the country's (short) democratic history. I then discuss the rise of Vox and the subsequent ending of the Spanish exception. Chapter 2 explores existing literature on European right-wing populist successes. Building off the work of previous scholars, I formulate a theoretical framework that can be deployed to find answers to my question. In Chapter 3, I describe the Vox party. This allows for further contextualization of the Spanish case and provides essential information needed to understand why such a party could succeed.

Chapter 1

The Spanish Exception

In the decades following Spain's peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy, the country enjoyed tremendous stability and success. Spain was politically defined by a two-party system with minority one-party governments, strong autonomous but asymmetrical regional powers, and an aversion and sensitivity to its authoritarian past. The country was held as a model in Europe, demonstrating how moderates in the ruling elite could cooperate in the negotiation and implementation of a peaceful democratic transition (Aguilar 2001). This transition occurred between 1975, the year of Dictator Francisco Franco's death, and 1978, the year of the Spanish Constitution's approval.

In the more than 40 years of modern Spanish democracy, the country has, however, faced its challenges. From an attempted military coup in 1982 to high-level corruption scandals, Spain is still far from the perfect democracy. However, throughout the country's short history, one particular phenomenon has been lauded as especially commendable. Despite facing many challenges that are often attributed to increases in extreme-right sentiments and popularity (which will be discussed throughout this chapter), no party representing the extreme-right had gained representation in 40 years of free elections. This placed Spain as one of the few European countries without one. This phenomenon, known as the Spanish exception, has since ended with the rise of the Vox party in 2018 and 2019.

Potential and Kinetic Energy: Ending the Spanish Exception

The way I first began to conceptualize the end of the Spanish exception came in reference to energy in the same way that physical scientists might think of it. Imagine running into a wall.

You build up as much speed as possible and try with all that you have to break through, but the

wall is too strong. Instead of blasting through to the other side, you will bounce backwards, probably hurt and discouraged.

This should not come as a shock to any reader. This is a simple concept: if the wall is strong, you will not be able to break through it. Beneath this idea is an elementary physics principle: energy. The wall, as a barrier between you and the side that you want to reach, has a certain amount of potential energy. You, as a person in motion, mustering your strength and speed, have a certain amount of kinetic energy. Because you could not smash through the wall and break onto the other side, the wall had more potential energy than you had kinetic. It is this simple inequality—that the wall's energy is greater than your own—that prevents your success.

If the wall was previously made of brick, now re-imagine it as a large piece of paper. With the kinetic energy that you are able to muster, you successfully break through the wall—after all, it is just a sheet of paper. The wall's energy has significantly decreased. Imagine another scenario: the wall is the original brick wall, but you have somehow greatly increased your size and speed. Even with the high potential energy of the wall, your kinetic energy has been raised to the point where you will overcome the wall's energy to break through to the other side.

The wall problem does not have to be physical. It exists in all fields and activities. If there is something to be done but a barrier in the way, either the barrier must lessen to be weaker than you, or you must gain some greater ability to break through the barrier. This is the Spanish exception—or better phrased, the *ending* of the Spanish exception.

In the following thesis, I investigate potential explanations for the ending of the Spanish exception. Before December of 2018, extreme-right parties had tried and failed to gain any significance in the Spanish political party landscape (for example, Fuerza Nueva and Alternativa

Española).¹ The barriers to entry were too high and the strength and energy of the parties were too little to break such a barrier. Then something changed. In 2020, Vox, a right-wing populist political party, is the third largest party in the Spanish national parliament. That party somehow gained enough energy to break through the barriers preventing a right-wing populist party for so long, and/or those barriers must have significantly weakened. This is the fundamental puzzle of the following thesis. What has changed for Vox? Why has this party gone from the margins to the third largest party in the Cortes Generales (Spain's parliament), and why now?

Approaching Democracy: A Very Brief History

Before addressing the many nuances to the question raised here, it will be essential to understand the context of the Spanish exception. Without understanding the context in which Spain exists today, it would also be impossible to observe how the Vox party has built momentum and gained access to political office. In the following chapter, I briefly address the history of the dictatorship, how the Spanish exception is defined, and the events that led to its eventual dismantling.

The roots of the Spanish exception go back to at the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Three years of war followed a military uprising led by General Francisco Franco in 1936 and against the leftist Spanish Second Republic. Franco's Nationalist army was victorious, resulting in some 300,000 dead and close to 30,000 bodies in unmarked mass graves (Davis 2005). Franco painted the war as particularly dichotomous: two sides went to battle, one side heroes, the other side villains—there would be no reconciliation or message of unity. Following the war, Franco became Spain's dictator. Under his regime, some 400,000 oppositionist entered camps and prisons, submitting to forced labor (Davis 2005). Franco's Spain suppressed regional diversity

and institutions in favor of a centralized nation state. His regime collaborated with Third Reich during World War II, positioning the dictator with the likes of Hitler and Mussolini in mid-20th century European history (Payne 2008).

The period under Franco is remembered very differently by many different Spaniards. Citizens not in camps and prisons faced many difficult conditions as well. Diseases and infant mortality rates increased while food consumption was lessened. Workers' rights were slashed as strikes became punishable with long prison sentences and trade unions were destroyed (Preston 1990). Some Spaniards, however, lived well under Franco. These were more conservative, nationalist, and Franco-sympathetic citizens, many of which fought in the Civil War.

General Franco died in 1975, wherein King Juan Carlos I took power. Juan Carlos I was more liberal minded than Franco and was also subject to increasing pressure for democratization from a new generation of Spaniards. Political modernization and pressure from Europe were finally catching up to Spain (Hottinger 1976). After initially leaving the Franquist incumbent head of government, Carlos Arias Navarro, in power, the King eventually appointed Adolfo Suárez as President, who called for and won the first democratic elections of the post-Franco era in 1977. Suárez's party, the Union of the Democratic Center (UCD), signaled a victory for reformists on the center-right and for moderates on the left (Chislett 2018). Elected parties from the 1977 election came together to write and ratify a constitution that consolidated the parliamentary democracy.² Spain had peacefully transitioned from dictatorship to democracy.

While the democratic founding served as an example of peace and compromise, the pacted transition would come at a certain cost.³ With representatives in the Franco regime still holding power when the dictator died, Suárez had the very difficult task of convincing others to accept Spanish liberal democracy. As argued by scholar Madeline Davis (2005), "the price of a

peaceful handover of power would be silence about the past” (867). However, for many years, the lack of governmental purging and historical reconciliation ensured that far-right sentiments could be tamed.

The Spanish Exception

This deal would be solidified with the 1977 passing of an amnesty law. Negotiating power largely lay in the hands of those with ties to the Franco regime. Amnesty protected the dictatorship from condemnation and ensured that former leaders within the Franco regime would not be purged from the judiciary or state administration (Boyd 2008; Raimundo 2013). Put simply, there was still space for the extreme-right within the government.⁴ In the transition, values of peace and stability superseded justice. Amnesty legally solidified the “pacto de olvido”—a pact of forgetting. The past was the past. It was time to focus on building the future. Integration of former Franco affiliates limited the possibility of outside trouble-makers and ensured a degree of unity and stability throughout the transition.

Following the first two free elections (in 1977 and 1979) where Suárez’s UCD brought about a stable first five years of democracy, the party landscape settled into a two-party dominant system, with additional regional and communist parties also occupying a small niche of the electorate.⁵ These dominant parties still exist today: the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (the PSOE) and the Popular Party (the PP). The most Franco-sympathetic politicians existed within the ranks of the PP. In the early years of democracy, the PP was staffed in part by those protected by amnesty. The PP occupied a broad swath of the political spectrum on the right, including moderate conservatives with an appetite for political reform and staunch nationalists that fit the Franco mold. This strategy had electorally payed off for the PP and had ensured a monopoly

over the political right in Spain (Ferreira 2019). The two-party system was crucial to ensuring that no populist right-wing group fully reminiscent of Franco's era would emerge. If it did emerge, it would be within the PP, which could be contained and controlled by a party interested in maintaining its democratic legitimacy and European reputation.

The two-party system was also upheld by a desire for stability. From 1970 to 1992, when asked "which should be the first aim of your country?" Spaniards rated "keeping order in the nation" as almost ten percentage points above the European mean. The people were willing to choose between these two relatively moderate parties because the choice signified stability (Aguilar & Humlebæk 2002). Even in 2008, 84 percent of all votes went to either the PSOE or the PP.

The Spanish exception not only refers to Spain's two- (rather than multi-) party system. The exception relies on the fact that a *right-wing populist party* had not emerged, not that *any smaller party* had not emerged. The recentness of Franco's regime ensured a certain taboo on extreme right-wing ideology (Aguilar & Humlebæk 2002). It also lay the foundation for a third reason for Spain's aversion to such a party: the country's relationship to the European Union. Demonstrating conformity to West European norms of democracy, Spain entered the EU in 1986. Franco-era sentiments would not be tolerated.

In the 21st century, Spain's relationship to the EU has continued to be a barrier to right-wing populist success. Many such parties around Europe use Euroscepticism and anti-globalism as fundamental characteristics of their protectionist platforms. Such tactics are unlikely to gain a strong footing in Spain. Since their accession to the EU, the country has been a net recipient of funds, receiving 95 billion more euros than contributed between 1986 and 2016 (Chislett 2018, 35). Additionally, following the economic crash of 2008, "exporting has been a path to survival

for many companies” (Chislett 2018, 51). Globalization is partially what lifted Spain out of the Great Recession. A right-wing Eurosceptic party was unlikely to find success in Spain using the same arguments employed by the National Front in France or the Alternative for Germany. Spain’s relationship to fascism, its two-party system, and its close relationship to the EU presented an unfavorable environment for right-wing populist party success (Aguilar & Humlebæk 2002; Chislett 2018).

The Spanish exception is especially surprising when considering the various conditions likely to drive right-wing populism. Aside from Eurosceptic policy, scholars have identified immigration and a protectionist economic policy as common foci for right-wing populist parties (Mudde 2016). Countries with low economic performance and high levels of immigration would likely be breeding grounds for right-wing populism. Spain fits this profile.

After experiencing historical Spanish emigration, between 1998 and 2012, the immigrant population in Spain jumped from 3 percent to 14 percent (González-Enríquez 2017). Spain is a frontier country, it borders the Mediterranean Sea—a channel for many Northern African immigrants. Within the European Union, Spain bears an extra burden of migration, patrol, and asylum cases.

Economically, Spain’s success was grounded in the construction market before the Great Recession. The construction “bubble” burst in 2007, leaving many unemployed and struggling. Spanish citizens felt the effects of the recession especially hard as the unemployment rate rose from 8 percent in 2008 to 26 percent in 2013 (González-Enríquez 2017). In 2019, the unemployment rate had dropped back to 14 percent (Eurostat 2019). While this statistic is still alarmingly high, it should be considered that “off-the-books” jobs in the informal economy account for around 17 percent of Spanish GDP (Chislett 2018). Spain also faces a rapidly aging

population, bringing about further worries with the pension system, the healthcare system, and the feasibility of the established strong social welfare state. Concerning immigrants and the economy in the 21st century, Spain seems to be the perfect place for right-wing populism. The barriers, highlighted by amnesty, a two-party system, and a strong relationship with the EU, prevented such a party from gaining success—until recently.

Ending the Spanish Exception: The Rise of Vox

Vox is not the first right-wing populist party to earn representation in a national parliament around Europe and the world. As recently as 2018, Spain remained “immune” from the growing trend amongst its European neighbors, as seen in Figure 1.1. While prior challengers did not emerge to right of the PP, Spain did experience a rapid expansion of its exclusively two-party system in 2015. Founded in 2011,

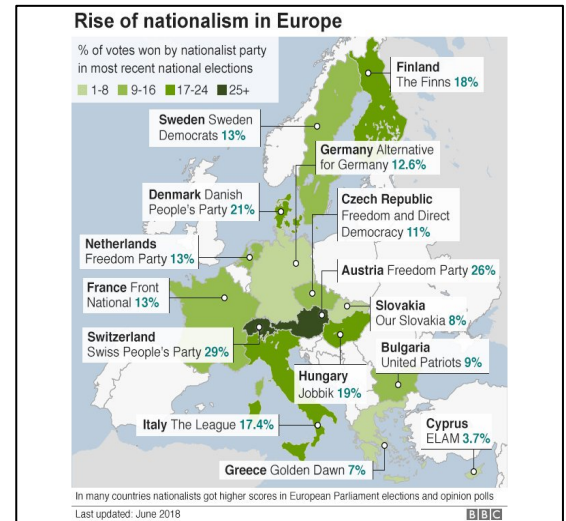


Figure 1.1: Image from the BBC, June 2018

a social movement rooted in contempt for economic policies perceived as corrupt and benefitting only the rich produced the leftist Podemos (“We Can”) party. Ciudadanos (“Citizens” or simply “C’s”) formed in Catalonia in 2006 in objection to a growing Catalan separatist movement—an issue adding to nationalist grievances that could rival the barrier of the Franco legacy. The C’s profile is economically liberal, socially moderate, and staunchly against Catalan independence.

The 2015 General Election ruptured the Spanish tradition of a two-party system, now featuring four relevant national political parties with the addition of Podemos and C’s. Still, strong challenges to the right of the PP remained absent. Table 1.1 displays electoral results from the first democratic elections in Spain to the most recent. Governing power (highlighted) has

largely been split between the PP and the PSOE, with only minor challenges to their near-majorities before 2015.

Table 1.1: Electoral results of Spanish general elections, 1977-Present

	1977	1979	1982	1986	1989	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011	2015	2016	2019 (April)	2019 (Nov)
PSOE	29.3	30.4	48.1	44.1	39.6	38.8	37.6	34.2	42.6	43.9	28.8	22.0	22.6	28.7	28.0
PP	8.3	6.1	26.4	26.0	25.8	24.8	38.8	44.5	37.7	39.9	44.6	28.7	33.0	16.7	20.8
C's	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.8	-	13.9	13.1	15.9	6.8
Podemos	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20.7	21.2	14.3	12.8
Vox	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2	0.2	10.3	15.1
UCD	34.4	34.8	6.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IU	9.3	10.8	4.0	4.6	9.1	9.6	10.5	5.4	5.0	3.8	6.9	3.7	-	-	-

Note: UCD (Union of Democratic Center), IU (United Left). Not included: Regional Party votes. Created by Author

The Spanish exception had been discussed and written about by scholars, politicians, and citizens as recently as 2017 and 2018. For example, in March of 2017, Spanish political scientist Carmen González-Enríquez noted:

Despite the hardships suffered by a good part of the Spanish population since 2008, and despite the broad loss of confidence in institutions and old political parties, it is difficult to image an extreme right-wing, xenophobic, anti-globalization and/or anti-EU party gaining a foothold in Spain in the foreseeable future (37).

In October of 2018, political scientist William Chislett added to this idea, stating that:

To Spain's great credit, the huge influx of immigrants has not produced any significant xenophobic, far-right movements or parties, making the country in this respect an exception to the norm in many other EU countries, such as the UK, France and Germany (70).

The Spanish exception came to an end soon after these were written. In December of 2018 in elections to the regional assembly of Andalusia, Vox, a party with strong elements of nationalism, populism, and social and fiscal policy to the right of the PP, won close to 11 percent of the vote (12 of 109 seats). This success afforded the party leverage enough to enter a coalition government (PP-C's-Vox) in Andalusia.

In the following months, Vox gained national attention and support. Details on Vox's rise and a discussion of the party can be found in Chapter 3. On April 28, the party earned over ten

percent of the vote in the general elections, winning 24 of 350 seats in the Spanish assembly.

Following failed coalition negotiations over the summer of 2019, Spain returned to the polls on November 10. While the PSOE, under the leadership of President Pedro Sánchez, maintained its lead and was able to form a coalition government with Podemos, Vox increased its share of the vote to over 15 percent (52 total seats). Today, Vox is the third largest party in the national congress. The Spanish exception has ended.

In the following thesis, I explore why this exceptional situation has come to an end. In doing so, I am addressing the same fundamental relationship described with energy and walls at the beginning of this chapter. How does one object overcome a barrier? Right-wing populist parties encountered barriers to enter into the Spanish party landscape for many years. Suddenly a party broke through this wall. Either the party is stronger—it has built momentum, it has capitalized on the ethos of the time, etc.—or the barriers to enter have lowered. I argue that both are true. In doing so, I argue that multiple explanations are necessary for understanding Vox’s breakthrough.

This thesis does not develop a singular hypothesis. Instead, throughout Part II, I test multiple hypotheses to better understand which opportunities were important to Vox’s electoral success. Inherent in this multi-level explanation, however, are two ideas that the thesis consistently defends. First, no one event or phenomenon can be fully attributed to the end of the Spanish exception. The rise of Vox should be explained as the culmination of opportunities at multiple levels that span Spanish institutional changes, actions of political parties, and shifts in voter priorities. Second, additional explanations to existing literature are necessary to better understand the right-wing populist party success—especially in Spain. Even when barriers first

seem insurmountable, Vox and Spain provide an important case study as to why today, no place is completely resistant to the populist right-wing.

Chapter 2

Explaining the Rise of Right-Wing Populist Parties

In the following chapter, I review how earlier studies examine right-wing populist successes in other countries. Before laying out the theoretical framework employed in this study, I characterize the traditions and approaches that conceptualize parties falling to the right of traditional center-right parties on the political spectrum. This allows for a clear definition of the party family relevant to this study. Next, I focus on the framework that will be used throughout the thesis. I follow a similar model to Arzheimer and Carter's (2006) three-leveled political opportunity structure. The chapter closes with an overview of the methodology employed throughout the study.

Challenges to the Right of Center-Right

Right-wing populist parties have been a relevant and popular topic of scholarship since 1945. Following WWII, increasing scholarship sought to explain the factors leading to fascist party emergence (Mudde 2016). Beginning in the late 1980's and early 1990's, right-wing scholarship shifted from a historical focus to one of social science (Ignazi 1992; Betz 1994; Kitschelt 1994). Whereas previous literature described many trends observable in the 1930s and 1940s, scholarship moved to more testable and predictive studies. Right-wing parties no longer belonged exclusively in history books but could actually be found in some European parliaments. Table 2.1 demonstrates early victory for parties characterized to the right of traditional conservative European parties.

Table 2.1: Right-wing populist electoral results, 1980-1999

ELECTORAL RESULTS OF RADICAL RIGHT-WING PARTIES (%) IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN WESTERN EUROPE, 1980-99 (AVERAGE)				
	1980-84	1985-89	1990-94	1995-99
Austria	5.0	9.7	19.6	24.4
Belgium	1.1	1.7	6.6	10.9
Denmark	6.4	6.9	6.4	9.8
France	0.4	9.9	12.7	14.9
Germany (Federal Rep.)	0.2	0.6	2.3	3.3
Great Britain	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.0
Italy	6.8	5.9	9.5	15.7
The Netherlands	0.8	0.8	3.0	0.0
Norway	4.5	8.4	6.0	15.3
Sweden	0.0	0.0	4.0	0.0
Switzerland	3.8	6.3	10.9	9.3

Note: The following parties are included:
Austria: Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ); Belgium: Vlaams Blok (VB), Front National (FN); Denmark: Fremskridspartiet (FP), Dansk Folkeparti (DF); France: Front National (FN); Germany: Republikaner (REP), Deutsche Volksunion (DVU), Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD); Great Britain: British National Party (BNP), National Front (NF); Italy: Movimento Sociale Italiano/Alleanza Nazionale (MSI/AN); Netherlands: Centrumpartij (CP), Centrumdemocraten (CD); Norway: Fremskridspartiet (FP); Sweden: Ny Demokrati (ND); Switzerland: Auto Partei (AP), Schweizer Demokraten (SD), Lega dei Ticinesi (LT).

Sources: Author's calculation based on election returns; see H.-G. Betz and S. Immerfall (eds.), *The New Politics of the Right* (New York: St Martin's Press 1999); M. Minkenberg, 'Rechtsradikalismus/Rechtsextremismus', in D. Nohlen (ed.), *Kleines Lexikon der Politik* (München: Beck 2001), p.420.

Source: Minkenberg 2001

The emergence of right-wing parties was a puzzle that contradicted Lipset and Fokkan's (1967) "Freezing Hypothesis"—in which Western European political systems were thought to have been solidified in equilibrium upon the completion of the Industrial Revolution. These solidified party systems included mostly socialist parties to the left of center and conservative parties to the right. Initially, attention was given to challengers first on the left in the 1960's and 1970's with Green party movements. Post-materialist values presented an opportunity for a parties focused in environmental policy, feminism, anti-militarism (Inglehart 1977). Kitschelt added to Inglehart's challenge to the Freezing Hypothesis by extending the values, opportunities, and consequences of post-materialism to give attention to new right-wing parties emerging (1995). Post-materialist values not only opened an opportunity for the New Left, they also brought about ultra-conservative reactions to changing times.⁶ Today, the rise of right-wing parties in Europe, the elections of Donald Trump in the United States and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Brexit have drawn significant attention to the area of right-wing party studies. Party systems around the globe have not frozen. Increasing examples of challenger parties on the right

and left have encouraged scholarship on catalysts for party system change (Mudde 2016; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2018).

Before examining what drives party system change and electoral success for emerging right-wing parties, it is essential to conceptualize right-wing populist parties. This ensures that cross-national comparisons can be made using globally applicable definitions of the party family. Furthermore, conceptualization has important consequences for further analysis of these parties.

Mudde (2010) argues that conventional wisdom on populist right-wing parties follows a “Normal Pathology Thesis.” Here, right-wing populist parties capture a voting block that consistently holds radical views outside of the mainstream—an opposition to liberal democracy and an inclination to treat certain groups or cleavages as illegitimate. This leads to scholars exclusively focusing on right-wing populist parties through the psychology of voters rather than the practices of a party. Essentially, the Normal Pathology Thesis focuses exclusively on the demand side (the desires of voters) rather than the supply side (the actions of parties).

Following exclusively the Normal Pathology Thesis in the study of right-wing populism denies the applicability of established political science frameworks in studying party emergence.⁷ Contrarily, Mudde (2010) argues that key features to radical right ideology—nativism (the idea that only members of a native group should be occupying a state), authoritarianism (the strict ordering of society where challenges to authority are met with punishment), and populism (framing a struggle between “the people” and “the elite”)—are not outside of historical mainstream party policy. Therefore, such parties should be treated as radicalized versions of mainstream values (but not alien to such values). Considering that populist right-wing parties are not outside of the historical mainstream, scholars can then study a right-wing populist party not only through the lens of demand explanations, but also through established political science

frameworks that discuss the actual party. For this reason, the following thesis dedicates an entire chapter to discussing the Vox party (chapter 3). Clearly defining the unit of analysis—a right-wing populist party—is essential to employ further academic frameworks and create a uniform definition that can be applied on a cross-national basis.

Scholars classify these parties in various ways, combining terms such as populist, nationalist, anti-establishment, far-right, right-wing, radical-right, and extreme-right (Mudde 2016; Greven 2016; Brubaker 2017; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2018). Differences in classification owe to a variety of reasons. First, many of these terms do not deal with the same phenomena. For example, populism and nationalism deal with fundamentally different concepts (although right-wing populists often rely on elements of nationalism in a party platform). While populism relates to a set of frames deployed by a party that paints a dichotomous vision between a corrupt elite and a pure people, nationalism relates to an unwavering pride and privilege relating to one's nation (Brubaker 2017). However, these often overlap.⁸

Second, definitions of these terms are not always the same. For example, as Brubaker (2017) notes, populism on the left is normally defined in economic terms while populism on the right relies on identity-politics and nationalism. Authors have defined populism on the right as a political approach that depicts “the people” versus “the elite,” that speaks on behalf of those “pure” (usually in relation to ethnicity) people (sometimes referred to as a “silent majority”), that relies on ethno-pluralism (the idea of preserving distinct ethno-cultural groups), and that claims to be a movement rooted in “common sense” (Mudde 2016; Brubaker 2017).

Third, it is necessary to consider opposing points of view on labels and their power of stigmatization. For example, when asking Vox representatives if they accept the far-right label, they often cite it as a tool used by the left to de-legitimize their platform (Field Research 2019).

Instead, Vox party president Santiago Abascal prefers to frame his party not of the “extreme-right,” but of “extreme-necessity.” Whether or not to validate such titles or concerns is not the aim of this project. Accordingly, I will employ terminology that includes right-wing, populist, and nationalist. Such terms should not be seen as contentious.⁹ They also allow for careful comparison of Vox across borders to parties demonstrating similar tendencies around Europe and the world.

Political Opportunity Structure

This thesis deals with a change to the Spanish party landscape. The initial question posed in Chapter 1 asks why, in this current moment, the party landscape has changed contrary to the established belief in Spanish immunity from right-wing populism. In addressing this question, it is important to employ a theoretical framework that can assess specific developments and catalysts that make party landscape change a possibility in this political moment. Political opportunity structure provides this conceptual framework.

This framework relates to the various opportunities present for a group or movement to gain political momentum and success. Using such a structure allows for an examination into where existing political institutions are unresponsive to voter demands (Kitschelt 1994). When those demands are unmet, voters may look to other options to voice their dissatisfaction. These could include new parties (especially protest parties) or not voting. Opportunities are often met by parties that fill an open electoral niche. Political opportunity relies on catalysts presenting an opening in the party marketplace that existing parties do not currently fulfill or that were previously blocked by barriers of entry (Kitschelt 1995). Such barriers could include unfavorable voting rules or social taboos against different messages in society.¹⁰

Previous scholarship on right-wing populist success is often grounded in the “Modernization Thesis.” This thesis focuses on demand-side explanations of right-wing populist successes. The Modernization Thesis defines a left-behind voter as someone who feels disadvantaged by a changing social and economic world (Mudde 2016). As Betz (1994) argues, the result of globalization and economic modernization “has been a segmentation of society into those who possess the necessary education and social contacts to survive in a rapidly changing world and a minority that is increasingly falling behind” (176).

The conceptualization of the left-behind voter is interconnected with socio-demographic observations of populist right-wing voting bases. Betz (1994) notes that sympathizers are often found in groups considered at the “bottom” society: young people, those lacking proper education to succeed in the economy, people from single-parent households, and older people with minimal pensions. These are often people who are unable or unwilling to economically and socially adapt to the post-industrial world, creating sensations of anxiety and insecurity (Betz 1994). Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that the advancement of social liberalism has outpaced changing demographics, leaving society with voters who feel threatened by certain progressive policy issues aimed at correcting balances enjoyed by those in power for many years. Age, sex, race, education, and geography all define many power structures within society that have been challenged in the 21st century. As such, they often describe socio-demographic characteristics of populist right-wing parties.¹¹

The Modernization Thesis and the socio-demographic characteristics associated with the populist right-wing often lead scholars to point to increased immigration and economic frustration as catalysts for party landscape changes. However, these are insufficient to fully explain the Spanish case. As noted in Chapter 1, a fundamental point in the Spanish exception is

that no populist right-wing party rose *despite* the suffering economy following the 2008 recession and increased levels immigration in Spain. Explaining the rise of Vox and the end of the Spanish exception must then expand on demand-side explanations while also adding a discussion of supply-side factors that contributed to the party's surprising success.¹²

When explaining the Spanish case, it is necessary to incorporate a theoretical framework that includes both supply and demand-side political opportunities—opportunities for voters to voice new dissatisfactions and for parties to capitalize openings within the party landscape. Arzheimer and Carter's (2006) political opportunity structure approach incorporates both of these lenses in relation to right-wing populist successes. They use three levels of political opportunity which allow for a holistic examination of opportunities for Vox. These levels are differentiated on the basis of the permanence of their structures and temporal contexts in which they exist. They include long-term institutional opportunity, medium-term party system opportunity, and short-term contextual opportunity. In the following chapter, I discuss these three levels in detail. Using Arzheimer and Carter's (2006) theoretical framework, I dedicate Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to the analysis of the Spanish case at each of these levels of political opportunity. A three-tiered political opportunity framework allows for investigation and explanation of new salient issues in 2018 and 2019 that Vox has championed, changes to the party system that have afforded Vox an opportunity, and institutional barriers that have weakened that previously challenged right-wing populist electoral success.

The first level, long-term institutional opportunity, focuses on electoral systems, the state form, and levels of centralization (Willey 1998). These refer to systems in place that are fundamental to a political structure. They are written into constitutions and nearly unalterable.

Political opportunity at the institutional level is an important concern because it outlines constraints on a party system. This references the various barriers to entry for a previously unestablished right-wing populist party, adding to the supply-side explanation of Vox's breakthrough. If there is an opportunity at the institutional level, groups of voters and citizens have more incentive to form new parties rather than form interest groups or pushing for change within a party (Willey 1998).

Electoral systems—including vote-allocation systems, electoral thresholds, and district magnitude—can shape which parties are successful in elections. Willey (1998) discusses Duverger's mechanical and psychological effects of district magnitude. Mechanically, highly disproportional systems—a result of these electoral rules—lead to greater electoral distortion (signifying a difference between seat distribution and vote distribution). As a corollary, smaller parties are punished as seats are first allocated to larger parties. Psychologically, such rules can dissuade voters from supporting small or new parties for fear of “wasting” their vote (Carter 2002; Hooghe et al. 2006). Therefore, they may choose a large party without fully supporting a platform because it is the better of two options.

The state form also plays an important role in considerations of nationalism and nativism—both a focal point a radical-right ideology. Spanish right-wing nationalism often focuses on country-wide identity while seeing regional identity and regional political power as a threat to Spain. The structure of a quasi-federal system with powerful autonomous communities presents an opportunity for the nationalist right by fueling grievances relating to threatened Spanish unity. Decentralization also serves small and new parties by affording importance to regional elections. These elections are sometimes seen as “second order,” affording voters a degree of freedom to cast protest votes (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Regional elections can also

serve as testing grounds for new parties. If a party is able to concentrate resources and energy into more winnable regional races, they can build momentum to enter the national political arena.

Both electoral systems and the state form are long-term institutions. They will likely not change in the near future. This, however, does not mean that they do not belong in a conversation of the current opportunities for a right-wing populist party to gain electoral success. In Chapter 4, I explain that the institutions have not physically changed to reflect an opportunity for Vox. Instead, the social understandings of the barriers associated with these institutions have changed in recent years. What was previously a barrier to enter into the party landscape is no longer as strong. In Chapter 1, I noted that a change to the party landscape could happen either with a challenger party gaining strength and momentum *or* with the weakening of barriers that previously denied this change. Long-term institutions contribute to both of these explanations.

The second level of political opportunity—medium-term party system opportunity—includes the organization of a party system, the degree of convergence of mainstream parties, coalition styles of party systems, and party behavior (Arzheimer and Carter 2006). How parties act within a system is essential to understanding where space might open in a party landscape. Santori (1976) explored the idea of parties and system organization as explanatory variables for party system change by demonstrating that the more parties a system has, the more polarized it will be. Increasing the number of parties and ideological distance of parties can create a cascading effect in which newer, more extreme parties have greater opportunities to enter into the already fragmented party landscape (Jackman & Volpert 1996).

First, concerning ideological positioning of mainstream parties, Mair (1995) finds that a lack of recognizable difference between mainstream parties (here referring to socialist and

conservative parties) furthers alienation from the mainstream for some voters. Abedi (2002) similarly finds that the electorate is most open to anti-establishment parties if the ideological distance between two established parties is small (on the left-right scale). With increased convergence, establishment parties are seen as equal components of a unified political class, thus creating an opportunity for populist sentiments (Kitschelt 1995). However, Arzheimer and Carter (2006) find that in the case of right-wing parties, a move to the right by a conservative party can also increase right-wing success, potentially because the establishment party legitimizes the right-wing populist challenger.

Additionally, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018) argue that party performance can create political opportunities. Disappointing perceptions of performance can incite a process of party dealignment and realignment (Rydgren 2010). Therefore, noteworthy actions and ideological shifts create opportunities for change in the party marketplace (Rydgren 2005; Kitschelt 1995).

Intertwined with ideological shifts towards or away from the center is the coalition-building behavior of parties. Arzheimer and Carter (2006) find that a grand coalition (a coalition government including both the mainstream center-right and center-left parties) significantly increases right-wing electoral success. Cooperation with political opponents can strengthen the perception of the center-right as elite politicians striving to maintain power rather than uphold values. These opportunities are discussed at greater length in Chapter 5, which looks directly at party system changes, most of which were initiated by the PP, that have created openings in the party landscape for a populist right-wing party.

Finally, short-term contextual opportunity is largely issue-centered. Arzheimer and Carter (2006) argue that in the case of right-wing populism, immigration and unemployment have been central in the contextual level of opportunity. The 2008 financial crisis and the European migration wave serve as potential catalysts for recent focus on these specific issues around Europe. However, issues specific to individual countries can also be decisive to populist right-wing successes. In the Spanish case, for example, contention over the push for independence in Catalonia and issues relating to gender violence, feminism, and historical memory have gained significant attention in recent years. These, too, have the potential to create an opportunity for the populist right-wing.

One important distinction that Rydgren (2010) makes in studying Swedish and Danish radical-right cases is that short-term contextual opportunity is not about debate of issues, but is rather about issue promotion. Instead of these parties debating platforms, certain issues are forced to the front of rhetoric and media cycles. Furthermore, changes in media strategies allows for self-selection of issue promotion. Using social media, parties control their messaging and media rather than exclusively affording that privilege to media outlets.

Such a strategy is in line with Budge and Farlie's (1983) idea of issue ownership. Issue ownership theory suggests that candidates will find utility in the successful framing of "the vote choice as a decision to be made in terms of problems facing the country that [a party] is better able to 'handle' than [its] opponent" (Petrocik 1996, 826). Ownership of issues is a result of credibility and perceived competence (Bélanger & Meguid 2008). This status is won by an incumbent's record and/or association with an issue (Petrocik 1996; Walgrave et al. 2013). Although challenger parties may not have incumbent records, they can become associative

owners of issues through repeated problem identification and by offering the most extreme policy responses to an issue (Petrocik 1996; Lachat 2014).¹³

Other scholars challenge the idea of issue ownership by conditioning its effect on issue salience (Béranger & Meguid 2008; Walgrave et al. 2012). Ownership should have an effect on vote choice only when the specific issue in question is salient at the time. Therefore, right-wing parties can capitalize on the political opportunity of especially salient issues that they are perceived to own.

A discussion of issue ownership and salience is interconnected with frame theory. Many authors identify frames that are effective in mobilizing support when analyzing right-wing movements (Rydgren 2005; Mudde 2016; Greven 2016; Norris & Inglehart 2019). Common frames deployed by the populist right-wing relate to a backlash against the EU, immigration, and political correctness (Greven 2016; Norris & Inglehart 2019). Analyzing the frames deployed by right-wing populist parties is important in understanding the contextual opportunities available in a certain time period. Examining the frames deployed by Vox is crucial to understanding how the party has come to “own” certain salient issues. A further discussion of frames used by Vox can be found in both Chapters 3 and 6.

Arzheimer and Carter’s (2006) three-tiered political opportunity structure allows for a comprehensive analysis of Vox’s breakthrough. The remainder of the thesis does not try to point to one phenomenon and argue that it is the sole reason that a right-wing populist party has finally emerged in Spain. Instead, I argue that 2018 and 2019 included a functional combination of weakened barriers to entry into the party landscape and productive opportunities for right-wing populism to gain momentum and strength. Using three different tiers of political opportunity

allows for inquiries into institutional and behavioral explanations for Vox's success, both of which are relevant to explaining the end of the Spanish exception.

Consequences, Changes, and the Future

Scholarly work on right-wing populist parties has mostly focused on explaining party breakthroughs. More recently, some attention has shifted to examine the consequences of right-wing successes. Now a growing focus of scholars of the populist right-wing, it is important to consider the effects that such parties have on their political systems and policy outputs. Both Mudde (2006) and Greven (2016) include discussions of consequences in their work. Mudde (2006) argues that radical-right parties have had a profound impact on the general policy direction of immigration in Europe—successfully pushing more restrictive and exclusionary practices. Populist right-wing parties' electoral presence and pressure from within parliaments has forced the center-right to accept populist right-wing policy as necessary to appease voters—what Mudde (2006) calls, a “right turn” in the direction of politics. Greven (2016) focuses on the consequences of inclusion and exclusion of the populist right-wing in governments. He finds that including these parties in government has a taming effect on the parties.

Minkenberg (2013) addresses both of these consequences. He finds that holding office produces a taming effect rather than a right turn in a stable democracy. Only when right-wing populist parties interact with other established players do policy aims move forward. Significant policy influence by the populist right-wing, where it has been effective, has mostly come in relation to cultural or social policy (Minkenberg 2013).

Given the research question driving this thesis and its more explanatory nature, I do not give significant focus to consequences. Furthermore, because of the Vox's relatively recent

emergence in Spanish national politics, much remains to be seen regarding Vox party behavior within institutions. However, Vox provides a new case to study the consequences of electorally successful right-wing populist parties, an interesting and important future area of research.

Methods

Throughout this thesis, I follow the conceptual framework of Arzheimer and Carter's (2006) three-tiered political opportunity structure. I employ a mixed methods approach to the analysis of the rise of Vox. This case study relies on both qualitative and quantitative data to test various hypotheses throughout the project. Much of the analysis relies on first-hand accounts of the rise of Vox from Spanish citizens and politicians. In the summer of 2019, I conducted semi-structured interviews with regional politicians including parliamentarians and party spokespeople from six site locations in Spain. Many of their translated quotations appear throughout the thesis. I also draw qualitative data from political party programs, social media publications, television appearances, websites, and speeches.

I perform quantitative analysis throughout the thesis in order to test hypotheses posed in each chapter. The quantitative analysis draws on survey data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) December 2019 "post-electoral" barometer survey (3296), collected just after the November 10 General Election. I use this survey because it captures viewpoints closely associated with the most recent Spanish General Election. The CIS conducts multiple barometer surveys every year, some of which I also include throughout the project. The December survey consists of 4,804 respondents. Respondents were randomly selected with quotas for sex and age. Data was collected between November 29 and December 19, 2019. The survey includes respondents from 48 out of 52 provinces and 428 municipalities. Interviews were conducted in

person at the homes of the respondents. The age range is 18 years and older. Depending on the tests run, I further discuss the CIS, coding, and methodology in each analysis chapter.

Explaining the Rise of Vox

The thesis seeks to explain the end of the Spanish exception and the rise of Vox. As a very recent phenomenon, little scholarship exists on the Spanish right-wing populist case. My intention is for the following work to add to the vast literature of case studies on populist right-wing successes.

To do so, I deploy a theoretical framework incorporating political opportunity structures at three levels. In Chapter 1, I noted that throughout the thesis, I argue for two consistent ideas. First, the rise of Vox should be explained through multiple factors—it is impossible to point to just one event or phenomenon that ended the Spanish exception. Second, the case of Vox adds new explanations to existing literature on right-wing populist party successes. Three-tiered political opportunity structure allows for multiple explanations of Vox's success that add new explanations to the existing literature.

Chapter 3

The Vox Party

The purpose of this project is to explore why Vox has so rapidly come to occupy the position of the third largest force in the Spanish Parliament. Chapter 2 outlined the conceptual framework to be deployed in such an investigation. Before examining these three levels of political opportunity and why they help to explain Vox's success, it is essential to understand the party at the heart of this study. The following chapter addresses this unit, focusing on the party's building of momentum, its elite structure, its purpose, the policy that it promotes, its voters, and the style in which it operates. Examining the Vox party is important for understanding why it fits into the electoral niche that was open in the Spanish party landscape.

Building Momentum: A Brief History of Vox's Assent

Vox first gained significant attention following regional elections in Andalusia in December 2018. The party, however, had existed almost five years. Vox gained little electoral support initially, failing to win a seat in the 2014 European Parliament election, gaining just under two percent of the vote.¹⁴ Support declined in the following years with the party earning only 0.23 percent of the national vote in the 2015 General Election, and just 0.20 percent in the 2016 General Election.

The party gained rapid momentum in the following years. Coming in the form of rallies and protests, vocal leaders made a point to be noticed. The first significant demonstration came in October 2018 at a rally at the Vistalegre Palace in Madrid.¹⁵ While holding no parliamentary seats, Vox was still able to fill an entire stadium with over 9,000 flag-waving supporters.

Prominent party leaders including Santiago Abascal, Javier Ortega Smith, and Rocío Monasterio—all of whom will be discussed shortly—delivered an alarmist and threatening

message of the dangers that Spain faced. Separatists, ETA terrorists, communist and Spanish 2nd Republican (1931-1936) influences, violent and uncontrollable migrants, and radical feminist activists all culminated in the “threat” that Vox claims to resist (Lambertucci 2018).¹⁶ Filling Vistalegre signified a stark change to Vox’s status. No longer did the party seem quite as marginal and unthreatening to establish parties. Vox rapidly jumped from next to no votes in 2016 to winning ten percent of the votes in the 2018 regional election in Andalusia.

Building on regional electoral momentum, Vox participated in a massive rally in Madrid at the Plaza de Colón in February 2019. The demonstration boasted over 45,000 Spaniards, with some estimates from organizers claiming numbers in the hundreds of thousands (Junquera & García de Blas 2019). Vox joined the Popular Party as well as Ciudadanos at the rally, a symbolic and important move in the acceptance of the party into the Spanish political landscape. The shared stage served to legitimize Vox. For the first time, party president Santiago Abascal publicly stood amongst other significant party leaders: Pablo Casado (PP) and Alber Rivera (C’s). The fundamental complaints lodged at the rally claimed that Sánchez had caved to separatist/nationalist demands of Basque and Catalan parties—although the PSOE’s exit from negotiations with these parties signified a different story (Rodríguez 2019).¹⁷ Regardless of the legitimacy of the attacks by these three parties on the right, the demonstration came just three days before a budgetary vote that ultimately failed and led to elections in April. Vox again translated their momentum into electoral success, winning 24 seats in the national parliament with over ten percent of the vote in that election. The party was gaining energy and moving closer to breaking the Spanish exception.

Elite Structure: The People Behind the Party

Vox, a right-wing populist party, should be understood in the context of similar parties globally. Other European parties that fit the same definition often feature charismatic leaders (Mudde 2016). Marine Le Pen of the National Front in France, Victor Órban of Fidesz in Hungary, and Nigel Farage of UKIP in the United Kingdom provide strong examples of such figures. Vox, and specifically party president Santiago Abascal, is not an exception to this trend.

Abascal's family has been entrenched in politics for multiple generations. Born in 1976 in Bilbao, in the historically nationalist/separatist Basque Country, Abascal witnessed ETA terrorism connected to the Basque struggle for independence. Coming from a family on the right, Abascal was not socialized to sympathize with this struggle. Instead, his father was the Basque leader of the Popular Alliance (a precursor to the PP) and his grandfather had been a mayor in Franco's Spain in Amurrio, a small town in the Basque Country. Abascal is a career politician, representing the PP between 1994 and 2013 (Amón 2018). Before exiting the party, he served in the Basque regional parliament for the PP from 2005 to 2009 and then in public offices in Madrid beginning in 2010. While in Madrid, Abascal divorced his wife and in a time of much upheaval began to find problems with the PP. Citing issues of corruption, soft responses to terrorism, and a weak attitude towards independence sentiments, Abascal left the party in 2013 to start Vox (Iglesias 2019). Vox—meaning “voice” in Latin—was to speak on behalf of the “true” Spaniards disheartened by the weak performance of the PP and the worrisome direction of the country.

Abascal is often displayed on social media platforms participating in traditional Spanish (manly) activities—attending Bullfights, enjoying Spanish food and drink, celebrating Catholic



Figure 3.1: Santiago Abascal media persona, Image from Abascal's Instagram

events, and being active. Figure 3.1, showing Abascal smoking a cigar, is a photo from Abascal's Instagram from 2019. While these portrayals largely fit with the traditional ethos of the party, Abascal's personal life has produced some complaints of Catholic hypocrisy. Some have noted the disconnect between the strong traditional family values that the party preaches and Abascal's divorce (Amón 2018; Field Research 2019).

Along with the party president, Javier Ortega Smith, Rocío Monasterio, and Iván Espinosa de los Monteros constitute the remaining upper end Vox's party leadership. Ortega Smith, the party secretary general, was a former lawyer from Madrid and currently serves as a deputy in the national parliament. Monasterio, a former architect and wife of Espinosa de los Monteros, serves as the president of Vox for the community of Madrid. Espinosa de los Monteros, the party spokesman and deputy in the national parliament, is often a public face of the party, well known for his relations with the media. Interestingly, Espinosa de los Monteros earned a Master's degree in business from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University in the United States before returning to Spain and beginning a political career. While these three supporting elites were not former politicians, their political allegiances had previously lay with the PP (Iglesias 2019).

The Vox party also includes some politicians associated with the legacy or regime of General Franco, a fact often noted by other parties and the media. For example, the delegate to the national parliament from Cádiz, Agustín Rosety, was a General under the Franco dictatorship. His presence has been both defended and celebrated by the party. Figure 3.2 is



Figure 3.2: Espinosa de los Monteros defends Rosety, Image from Vox Twitter

a tweet from the official Vox account in which Espinosa de los Monteros argues that Vox should be “proud to incorporate General Agustín Rosety.” He then argues that with Vox in government, the party would abolish the Historical Memory law and allow for Spaniards to “return to think what they want about history.”¹⁸ Not only is Franco’s legacy alive in the ranks of Vox, its presence is actively defended and used to justify policy positions (here relating to historical memory).

Vox’s elite makeup is thus a unique mix of disenchanted former members of the PP and members of Spain and Franco’s old guard. The party’s highest ranks are thus representative of much of Vox’s policy and purpose. Backgrounds of Vox’s elites demonstrate an appetite for a stronger and more extreme right-wing—one promoting extreme-nationalism and ultra-conservatism.

Extreme Necessity: Vox’s Purpose

The party is often framed by its leaders as being of “extreme necessity”—typically articulated when deflecting attacks that the party is of the “extreme right” (Field Research 2019). Party leaders and voters argue that Spain has reached a breaking point. Echoed in rallies, speeches, and social media posts, Vox consistently argues for its “reasons to exist” (Vox Manifesto). These include scandals connected to previous governments and parties, a weakening of Spain in the domestic and global contexts, the erosion of values including merit, honor, and patriotism, and the inaccessibility of elite parties—here framed as “oligarchies” (Vox Manifesto 2019; Ferreira 2019).

Much of the party’s purpose centers on the idea that existing parties have failed the Spanish people. By framing Spain as a nation in crisis (both a crisis of values and of politics),

Vox argues that solutions should not be entrusted to those parties that have created and worsened these encroaching “threats” of national cohesion, uncontrolled migration, globalism, and radical progressivism (Field Research 2019).

In framing the current moral and political circumstances in Spain as a time of crisis, Vox positions themselves as “the resistance.” Progressive movements threaten a certain image of traditional Spain. However, the party has arrived to ensure that Spain can return to its glory—a globally recognizable message amongst right-wing populist nationalists. Noted by one regional spokesperson for the PSOE, Vox markets a return to a version of Spain of the past, “where the sun never sets, grand Spain and all of this (without naming Franco because they know that you can’t do that)” (Interview, Murcia, July 2019). This framing positions Vox as a prideful and pure David fighting against Goliath, made up of the various Spanish and global forces that threaten prosperity and a traditional way of life.

Distinguishing Policy Positions

The fight against threatening forces is clearly articulated in Vox’s central policy aims. Vox’s policy foci include four major areas: Catalonia and center-periphery relations, immigration and Islam, economy policy, and resistance against the “progressive dictatorship.” Each of these areas are framed in threatening terms, as if Spanish elites are seeking to destroy all that the “true” or “pure” Spaniards enjoy.

In Vox’s manifesto, a foundational principle of the party’s existence is the defense of the “indissoluble unity of Spain” (100 Medidas 2019). Given the October 2017 Catalan referendum on independence and resultant aftermath of the illegal procedure (discussed in greater length in Chapters 4 and 6), Vox places a strong emphasis on reforming the state form and the ongoing

crisis. The party advocates for outlawing separatist parties and for extremely harsh criminal sentences for those implicated in the push for independence. However, the policy does not stop in the region of Catalonia.

On a larger scale, Vox argues for a foundational “transformation of the State of Autonomies into a unitary state of rights that promotes equality and solidarity instead of privileges and division” (100 Measures 2019). The party focuses on language as a driving motivation for reducing or eliminating regional sovereignty. Vox argues that Spaniards have a right to use the Spanish language in all national territory and that public education systems should not include regional languages or dialects.¹⁹

Not only is this policy framed in cultural and patriotic arguments, but it also draws on morally driven rationales. As argued by a Vox party member, “here [in the Basque Country] we live very well, but at the cost of the rest of the Spanish People” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). Some regions, considered historic nationalities for their distinctive cultures, languages, and histories, send regional parties to the national parliament that are disconnected from the four (now five) major parties. These seats have been essential in guaranteeing majorities or support for the PSOE or the PP, which affords the regional parties significant leverage in negotiations for various ministries or privileges.²⁰ Vox often discusses this electoral position of strength as a grievance, arguing that a unitary system could do away with regional differences, advantages, and parties. Beneath this policy, however, includes the unification of Spanish culture and the potential elimination of autonomous diversity (for example, language)—reminiscent of Spain during the Franco dictatorship.

In line with many other right-wing populist parties around Europe, Vox places a significant policy emphasis on immigration. Spain, a frontier country bordering the

Mediterranean Sea, bore a large responsibility relating to the influx of migrants in Europe since 2015. In 2018, the number of migrants arriving from Africa surpassed levels in both Greece and Italy (Turnbull-Dugarte 2019). Vox often frames these migrants as violent criminals that are incompatible with Spanish culture and tradition, offering a contrast to the existing image of Spain as tolerant and welcoming to outsiders. As such, Vox's policy reflects a harsh stance towards undocumented immigrants and strict laws for entry. Conversely, the party is far more open to migration from the Hispanic world, arguing that these cultures fit better in Spain than those connected to Islam. Vox's discourse on immigration reframes the issue from a racial one to a cultural one. One Vox party member expresses that immigration is a matter of "cultural races. It is not a color race" (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). This framing cites a supposed cultural superiority—still a form of racial resentment—as potential justification for strict immigration measures.

Economically, Vox seeks to reduce taxes and government spending. The party also argues in favor of protecting Spanish interests above European interests. This framework can appeal across the socioeconomic spectrum. Noted by one PSOE spokesperson, "both [upper and lower classes] want to protect what is theirs. Because they have little and they must protect their work [from immigrants] or because they have a lot and they must protect their wealth and status" (Interview, Murcia, July 2019). Fiscally, Vox argues for liberal economic policy within Spain and a protectionist stance against rising "threats" of globalization and immigration.

Vox offers a new Eurosceptic view on the right. As discussed in Chapter 1, anti-EU sentiments are not particularly strong in Spain. However, Vox is adamant in promoting an "España primero," or "Spain first" dialogue much like the United States' "America first" discourse. As put by one regional Vox parliamentarian, there are two forces in Spain,

“sovereigntist and globalists. We defend the sovereignty of Spain...the others, to [her], defend globalism and look to expand a con-federal Europe” (Interview, Valencia, July 2019). While not nearly as anti-EU as other right-wing populist parties around Europe, Vox offers a dichotomous picture of parties through a “Spain first” framework.

Vox social policy is extremely conservative and argues for a protection of the status quo. Most focus in this area is dedicated to gender violence and anti-feminism, LGBTQ movements, and historical memory. The party manifesto establishes that Vox works to “care and protect the family as a basic institution” (100 Medidas 2019). Furthermore, the manifesto argues that Spaniards should not be ashamed of their history (100 Medidas 2019). Vox hopes to abolish two laws that continue to undermine traditional and established orders in the social realm. Both past under socialist former President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the 2004 Gender Violence Law, which extends protections and rights to women experiencing violence at the hands of men, and the 2007 Historical Memory Law, which seeks to address some of the country’s unsettled relationship to its dictatorial past, both continue to draw criticism from Vox politicians. The party argues that women do not deserve special treatment under the law in regards to domestic violence, and that the government has no place in establishing interpretations of Spanish history. Figure 3.3 shows a graphic posted by Vox on Twitter in 2019 claiming that “violence does not have a gender.” Instead, the party prefers a term void of gender, reframing the issue as “inter-familial violence.”



Figure 3.3: Violence does not have a gender, Image from Vox Twitter

Both gender violence and historical memory are grouped together. Argued by one Vox regional parliamentarian, these are “totalitarian laws” that attempt to indoctrinate a progressive way of thinking (Interview, Valencia, July 2019). Such social policies seek to actively correct

societal imbalances. However, as explained by one regional Podemos parliamentarian, “Vox denies the need for positive discrimination” (Interview, Murcia, July 2019).

The party enjoys their status as the protagonists of a resistance narrative. Party members are the defenders of tradition and refuse to bow to what they describe as the “progressive dictatorship.”²¹ Conversely, one regional PSOE parliamentarian argues that the party’s policies “generate hate against those who are different, intending that social advances in [the] country—equality between men and women, integration of the gay community—reverse” (Interview, Castile and Leon, June 2019). This message, whether interpreted as free-thinking resistance to a progressive momentum or hateful traditionalism, is central to Vox’s platform.

Who’s Listening: Vox’s Voter Base

Understanding Vox not only requires knowledge of the party’s elite ranks and policy, but also necessitates an exploration into the party’s voters. As a new party, voters must have migrated from previous political alignments or from positions of abstention. There is broad consensus amongst politicians that Vox mostly drew from previous PP voters (Field Research 2019). Expressed by one PSOE spokesperson, “the nucleus and strong base [of Vox] is the former PP voter—conservative but above all belonging to the pissed off right” (Interview, Murcia, July 2019). Vox party leaders agree with the sentiment of dissatisfaction. One Vox party member expressed that Vox is for “the people who have had it up to their noses with the rift that is caused by the current democratic system” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019).

This rift mainly refers to political dysfunction caused by the two major parties and the division felt by issues including the Catalan push for independence and progressive social policy. Evidence of voters leaving the PP for Vox is suggested by net gains and losses of parties from

the 2016 General Election to the 2019 April election. The PP fell from almost 29 percent of the vote in 2016 to just under 17 percent in April 2019. This difference is made up with the two percent electoral increase for Ciudadanos from 2016 to 2019 and jump of around ten percentage points (from 0 to 10) for Vox.

The PP was a former “catch-all party,” given its broad reach amongst the conservative voting bloc. The party featured significant voter diversity with socioeconomic and geographical differences. Existing literature on right-wing party membership and support often focuses on sociodemographic characteristics (Betz 1994; Norris & Inglehart 2019). These characteristics often encompass people who are unable or unwilling to economically and socially adapt to the post-industrial world, creating sensations of anxiety and insecurity (Betz 1994). Age, sex, and socio-economic status each play an important role in predicting who may be “adapting” and who may feel left behind. Each of these variables exist within power structures that continue to change, thus creating feelings of being left behind when one’s position of power is threatened.

To test which socio-demographic variables are strong predictors of vote choice in Spain, I use survey data from the December CIS referenced in Chapter 2. I hope to establish relevant socio-demographic characteristics to use as control variable throughout Part II of this thesis. I include four socio-demographic characteristics as independent variables in a regression. These include sex, age, socio-economic status, and a simplified question to address the autonomous community from which a respondent is from. I use these because they have been identified as strong socio-demographic indicators of a tendency to favor right-wing populist parties in Europe (Betz 1994; Norris and Inglehart 2019). Sex is coded as binary, with males as a 0 and females as a 1. I code age into six groupings to simplify the data. Those between 18 and 29 (inclusive) are coded as a 0, between 30 and 39 as a 1, between 40 and 49 as a 2, 50 and 59 as a 3, 60 and 69 as

a 4, and 70 and older as a 5. Socio-economic status is based on self-reported interpretations of where respondents stand economically. Those in the upper class are coded as a 0, those in the upper-middle class as 1, those in the middle class as a 2, those in the lower-middle class as a 3, those in the working class as a 4, and those in the self-identified poor class as a 5.

My final variable is a binary measure that addresses a respondent's autonomous community. Vox voters are rarely from the regions that are considered historic nationalities, including Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia. The reasons for this important distinction are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. Of a possible 89 seats in the national congress for these three communities, Vox won only two representatives. I code respondents from a region considered a historic nationality as a 0 and those from any other region as a 1. Table 3.1 shows voting percentages in the November 2019 General Election by autonomous community (and two autonomous cities, Ceuta and Melilla) and party. At the top are the communities with the highest Vox voting percentages.

Table 3.1: November 2019 General Election by Autonomous Community

Autonomous Community	Vox % (Seats)	PSOE % (Seats)	PP % (Seats)	Podemos % (Seats)	Ciudadanos % (Seats)	Other Parties Total % (Seats)
Ceuta	35.2 (1)	31.3 (0)	22.3 (0)	3.9 (-)	3.4 (-)	-
Murcia	28.0 (3)	24.8 (3)	26.5 (3)	8.9 (1)	7.4 (-)	1.9 (-)
Castile-La Mancha	21.9 (5)	33.1 (9)	26.9 (7)	9.2 (-)	6.8 (-)	-
Andalusia	20.4 (12)	33.4 (25)	20.5 (15)	13.1 (6)	8.1 (3)	1.3 (-)
Valencia	18.5 (7)	27.6 (10)	23.0 (8)	13.4 (4)	7.7 (2)	7.2 (1)
Melilla	18.4 (-)	16.4 (-)	29.5 (1)	2.6 (-)	3.0 (-)	-
Madrid	18.3 (7)	26.9 (10)	24.9 (10)	13.0 (5)	9.1 (3)	5.7 (2)
Balearic Islands	17.1 (2)	25.4 (2)	22.8 (2)	18.1 (2)	7.4 (-)	2.3 (-)
Aragon	17.0 (1)	30.7 (6)	23.9 (4)	10.8 (1)	8.6 (-)	6.1 (1)
Extremadura	16.8 (2)	38.3 (5)	26.0 (3)	9.1 (-)	7.6 (-)	-
Castile and León	16.6 (6)	31.3 (12)	31.6 (13)	9.3 (-)	7.6 (-)	-
Asturias	15.9 (1)	33.3 (3)	23.2 (2)	16.0 (1)	6.7 (-)	2.3 (-)
Cantabria	14.9 (1)	23.2 (1)	25.9 (2)	8.7 (-)	4.8 (-)	21.0 (1)
Canary Islands	12.5 (2)	28.9 (5)	20.8 (4)	14.7 (2)	5.4 (-)	14.7 (2)
La Rioja	11.5 (-)	34.9 (2)	34.3 (2)	9.8 (-)	7.1 (-)	-
Galicia	7.8 (-)	31.2 (10)	31.9 (10)	12.6 (2)	4.3 (-)	9.6 (1)
Catalonia	6.3 (2)	20.5 (12)	7.4 (2)	14.2 (7)	5.6 (2)	43.8 (23)
Navarre	5.8 (-)	25.0 (1)	-	16.6 (1)	-	46.5 (3)
Basque Country	2.4 (-)	19.2 (4)	8.8 (1)	15.4 (4)	1.1 (-)	51.4 (10)
TOTAL	15.1 (52)	28.0 (120)	20.8 (89)	12.9 (35)	6.8 (10)	13.7 (44)

Electoral Results by Autonomous Community, General Elections 10 November, Created by Author, data from *El País*

The party underperforms in communities that are considered historic nationalities (Galicia, Catalonia, and the Basque Country). This should not come as a surprise, as a large aspect of Vox's platform includes the reduction or elimination of regional autonomy.

To measure my dependent variable, I use the question: "Could you tell me the name of the party or coalition that you voted for in the last general election to the Congress of Deputies this past November 10?" Because I am specifically concerned with Vox and not the entire political spectrum, I again code my dependent variable as binary: a 0 for those who reported voting for a party other than Vox, and a 1 for those who reported voting for Vox. I also exclude those who indicate that they cannot remember, abstained, did not vote, or did not answer the question. This exclusion significantly decreases the sample size, an important note in the potential limitations of this study. Furthermore, the system of self-reported voting habits could introduce a level of social desirability bias. It is possible that certain stigmas exist in relation to voting for a party considered by some as "extreme."

A summary of the variables and be found in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Summary of Variables, Socio-demographic test

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Independent Variables					
Sex	0.5154	0.4998	0	1	4,804
Age	2.6109	1.6555	0	5	4,804
Socio-economic Status	2.6717	0.9557	0	5	4,502
Historic Nationality	0.7966	0.4025	0	1	4,804
Dependent Variable					
Vox Vote Choice	0.1074	0.3097	0	1	3,371

Source: CIS Barometer, December 2019

I run a single-modeled multi-variate logistic regression analysis to address the significance, magnitude, and direction of the relationships between socio-demographic variables and vote choice. I test the following hypotheses:

1. *Men are more likely to have voted for Vox*

2. *Younger respondents are more likely to have voted for Vox*
3. *Respondents of lower socio-economic status are more likely to have voted for Vox*
4. *Respondents from non-historic nationalities are more likely to have voted for Vox*

The rationales for these hypotheses align with previous conceptions of demographics of right-wing populist party supporters (Betz 1994). For example, Vox's presentation as an alternative party is likely to attract younger voters and voters from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Furthermore, in line with the previous findings on right-wing populist party support, its support is likely to feature more men than women (Mudde 2019). Vox's overt Spanish nationalism is also likely to dissuade voters from historic nationalities. Results of the logistic regression can be found in the Appendix. The predictive margins are presented in Figures 3.4 A, B, C, and D. In each figure, I calculate the predicted probability of voting for Vox at various levels of the key independent variable being examined (here, sex, age, socio-economic status, and region) while holding all other variables at their means.

Figure 3.4 A: Sex vs. Vox Vote Choice

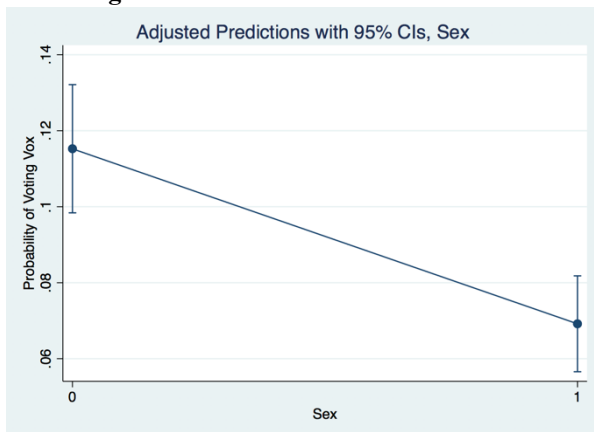


Figure 3.4 B: Age vs. Vox Vote Choice

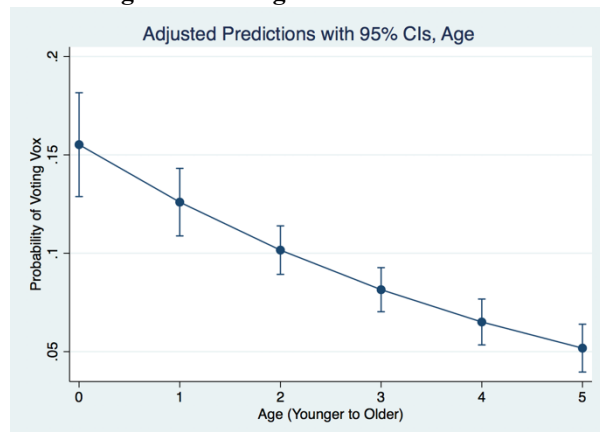
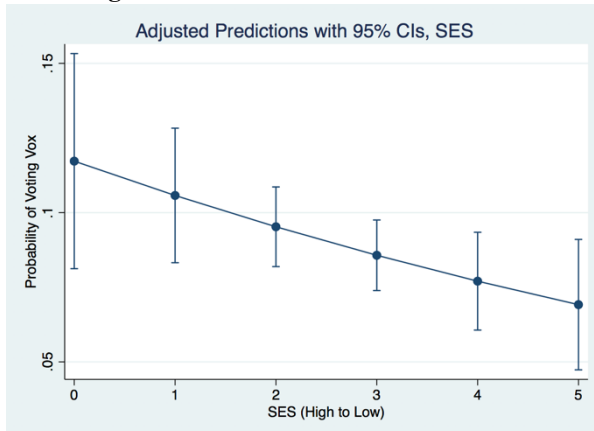
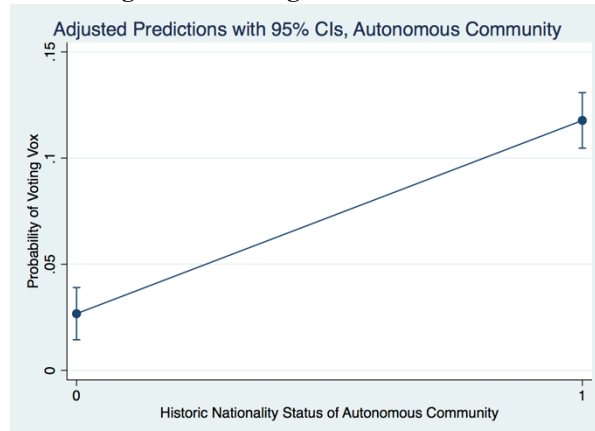


Figure 3.4 C: SES vs. Vox Vote Choice**Figure 3.4 D: Region vs. Vox Vote Choice**

The predicted directions of these relationship relationships are confirmed for all socio-demographic variables except for socio-economic status. As seen in Figure 3.4 C, respondents of a higher socio-economic status are more likely to vote for Vox. However, the association fails at a five percent significance level, with a p-value of 0.070. I therefore cannot conclude that socio-economic status is a strong predictor of vote choice for Vox.

Only sex, age, and historic nationalities are statistically significant, each with p-values less than 0.00. Males are almost six percentage points more likely than females to have voted for Vox. Respondents in the youngest group (18-29) were more than ten percentage points more likely to have voted for Vox compared to the oldest age group. Respondents from regions not considered “historic nationalities” were more than nine percentage points more likely to have voted for Vox than their Catalan, Basque, and Galician counterparts. In summary, Vox voters are most likely to be (although not exclusively) younger males from regions that are not considered historic nationalities.

Capturing Votes: Vox's Unconventional Political Style

Vox deploys three relevant frames in marketing their party to voters. These include a populist framework, a resistance framework, and an anti-political correctness framework. These each fill gaps in the Spanish political party landscape that were previously vacant. While Podemos is generally regarded as a populist party, it occupies this space exclusively with those sympathetic to leftist, progressive, socialist, and communist sentiments. Additionally, no other party dedicates the same amount of energy to maintaining traditionalist values than Vox, affording them the status of resisters to progressive social momentum. Finally, Vox celebrates their willingness to break from politically correct language and policies. In doing so, the party markets themselves as un beholden to the rules of the game that (failing, as Vox argues) parties such as C's or the PP have abided by. Vox's stylistic frameworks can be located in their media styles, their overt nationalism, and their policy choices.

Vox does much of their political marketing through social media. Without representation in parliaments, self-controlled media was one of the primary ways to first spread the party's message and name. Vox is able to reach a wide audience through Twitter and Instagram pages, a strategy especially effective in attracting younger support.²² Furthermore, this strategy feeds well into Vox's populist message—Vox promotes its content on free sites that are accessible to the people. On social media, Vox is often critical of other Spanish politicians, arguing that such elites continue to act against the will of the people. The party also promotes an ultra-nationalist message throughout its various accounts. As one spokesperson for Podemos describes: “if you look at the Vox Instagram account, it is an attractive political image...for a young Spaniard...who feels proud to be Spanish” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). Marketing is directed at “true Spaniards.” It is a simple, digestible, and uncritical celebration of Spanish-ness.

Vox especially celebrates and promotes its status as resisters through its media avenues. The party is often featured on television programs as sole defenders of traditional social policies. Best exemplifying this resistance frame in the media is the party's Twitter and Instagram posts immediately following the April 2019 election. Figure 3.5 shows the image posted by Vox—the only defenders of “true” Spain—ready to take on such forces including



Figure 3.5: *Lord of the Rings* Resistance, Image from Vox Twitter

Catalan separatists, LGBTQ lobbies, communism, feminism, and leftist media outlets. While this picture may first be interpreted as an unconventional and somewhat strange way to celebrate the party's first electoral success in the national political scene (with the image being taken from a *Lord of the Rings* scene), it is no joke. Vox often uses memes (a media style attractive to youth) to prove themselves as unique and paint opposing parties as frauds or sellouts. Through the media, Vox frames itself as the one true defense against progressive values.

Vox uses the media as an avenue to reject political correctness as well. One example of this is Vox's response to the Notre Dame fire in April of 2019. Vox took quickly to social media



Figure 3.6: *Abascal on the Notre Dame Fire, Image from Abascal's Twitter*

to criticize other media outlets' attempts to label the cathedral as a European symbol—thus signifying a loss for all of Europe and its culture. Figure 3.6 shows a tweet from Santiago Abascal. He criticizes the “fake news of being incapable of saying in their headlines that Notre Dame is a Christian symbol. That's why no one believes [the ‘fake news’] anymore.” Abascal positions himself as a unique voice that speaks on behalf of the people, even when the statement may not be “politically correct.” In a similar vein to American (Trumpian) linguistic battles over “merry Christmas” compared to

“happy holidays,” Abascal champions “Christian” symbology over the more inclusive “European” interpretation.

Another avenue through which to notice Vox’s frameworks deployed is the party’s overt displays of nationalism. According to one PSOE spokesperson, “when [Vox] begins a gathering, all of a sudden...they stand up and sing the song ‘el novio de la muerte,’ a symbol that everything is good...something of ultra-pride” (Interview, Murcia, July 2019). Such a practice is in line with Vox’s media presence, speeches, and policy. An uncritical love of country is central many right-wing populist frameworks—Vox included. Vox is the only party unapologetically defending the Spanish nation and “true” Spaniards.

Vox also celebrates the Spanish flag more than any other party. The same PSOE spokesperson admitted, “we gave, after many years...the flag of Spain and the national song to the right” (Interview, Murcia, July 2019). Vox has seized this gift to frame themselves as the only party unconcerned with or without hesitation to overt displays of nationalism. With this, the party presents itself as resisters to a European and Spanish pressure to be more reserved in their Spanish pride. Here, Vox is also resisting a norm of correctness—that ultra-nationalism is not acceptable. As one Vox party member notes, “if you defend Spain, you are a Franquist, which is a lie” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). Vox argues that even when the rest of the parties criticize it for breaking the taboos around flags and nationalist pride, the party has a certain sense of authenticity for their rejection of the politically correct norms.

A final area that Vox’s populist, resistance, and political-incorrecness frames are deployed is the party’s proposed policies. Their social policy—including gender relations, LGBTQ rights, and their assurance to defend “the family”—all reflect a characteristic right-wing populist thread. It is only the people who live a certain way, that conform to historical and

cultural norms, that are defended in Vox policy. These would be the “pure people,” or “true Spaniards.” The party argues that while the PP and C’s have shifted their policy to mirror current progressive momentum, Vox has stood its traditionalist ground. This argument references both resistance and political correctness. As a Vox party member notes, “our message is very difficult because we go against the feminist and LGBTQ lobbies” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). Similarly, a Podemos spokesperson notes that “PP or Ciudadanos will never cross a line...but Vox will” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). As taboos and norms change to reflect a more socially liberal society, Vox resists this momentum even when considered incorrect—all in a style that the PP and C’s refuse.

Vox understands their own policy as “common sense.” As described by a Vox party member, “with immigration, delinquency, and taxes...it’s all common sense” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). This understanding fits in the populist, resistance, and political incorrectness frameworks. An argument for a “common sense” alludes to elites over-complicating policy and not working on behalf of simple people. Vox resists such over-intellectualism with simple solutions, even when they are now deemed politically incorrect.

Vox incorporates elements of populism, resistance narratives, and anti-political correctness into their unconventional style. This style—and the essence of the entire party—is well summed up by one regional Vox parliamentarian with the following message: “if defending values and principles is extreme-right, then I am of the extreme-right” (Interview, Valencia, July 2019). Vox is a party seeking to defend values and a way of life enjoyed by “pure Spaniards” throughout history. When all other parties are moving in a different direction, Vox resists. The label of extremist or political incorrectness will not stop this mission. Such a style has secured

Vox as the champion of voters who feel discouraged, left behind, frustrated, and hopeful to return to some version of Spain's past.

Vox is a young party, having only gained significant momentum throughout 2018 and 2019. It is a party with a strong central leader in Santiago Abascal, similar to many other right-wing populist parties throughout Europe. Vox's elite structure represent both defectors from the PP and connections with the Franco regime. The party has gained popularity in a time in which some voters agree that resistance to social change and corrections to the perceived political disfunction are of "extreme necessity." Facing such threats, Vox's policies attempt to resist separatist, corrupt, globalist, and progressive forces. Voters receptive to this message tend to be younger males from non-historic nationalities. These voters are attracted to an unconventional message in the Spanish political landscape—one that includes elements of populism, a resistance narrative, and a rejection of political correctness.

Part II

Part I of this thesis focused on three phenomena central to understanding Vox in Spain. However, none of these directly addresses the fundamental question of the thesis. I have discussed the Spanish Exception and given an overview of its subsequent ending, outlined how other scholars have explained right-wing populist party successes in the past, and described some key features of the Vox party. While describing *who* Vox is and *what* is significant about the Spanish political landscape, these chapters did not seek to understand *why* Vox has found success in this current moment.

The next three chapters give significant attention to multiple explanations that address why the Spanish exception has come to an end. Chapter 4 focuses on changes to social understandings of Spanish institutions, Chapter 5 discusses opportunities in the Spanish party system in 2018 and 2019, and Chapter 6 analyzes specific contextual issues that explain the rise of Vox. Outlined in Chapter 1, two ideas will be constant throughout this thesis. First, I contend that multiple explanations are necessary for understanding why Vox has found success in 2018 and 2019. Next, I argue that there exist certain factors and explanations that contribute to Vox's rise that are either new to the scholarship or have not yet received significant attention. Part II presents a clear defense of these two ideas while addressing explanations for Vox's breakthrough.

Chapter 4

Institutional Barriers and Opportunities

This chapter is specifically dedicated to the first, longest-term, and most permanent level of political opportunity. Following Arzheimer and Carter's (2006) three-tiered political opportunity organization, the following explanation focuses on the institutional barriers and opportunities present in Spain that have either discouraged or fostered Vox's success. Political opportunity structures are categorized as "long-term" given their status as permanent features of the state or political system.²³ While the actual rules and structures are not easily changed, the social understandings of such features can change over time, opening new institutional opportunities.

The following chapter splits institutional political opportunity into two categories: electoral systems and state form.²⁴ Electoral rules can play the role of gatekeeper in a party landscape—either facilitating or impeding opportunities for new party emergence.²⁵ While the Spanish electoral system had presented a barrier for new parties in the past, recent fragmentation, polarization, and a weakening of the "wasted" vote argument, indicates that the barrier is much weaker now than before (Jackman & Volpert 1996; Carter 2002).

The state form also can encourage certain discourses or grievances. The push for independence in Catalonia has amplified center-periphery divisions and has increased grievances brought forward by nationalist and pro-centralization politicians and voters. While the Catalan push for independence has not actually changed the state form, the unity of Spain is a growing concern for voters (Grau Creus 2018). Vox, a party with the most extreme centralist policy agenda, has found an opportunity through the growing grievances created by the Spanish state form.

Electoral Systems and Right-Wing Populist Parties

I begin this chapter with a discussion of electoral systems, rather than the degree of centralization, for two reasons. First, more attention in the literature on right-wing populist parties is dedicated to electoral systems as primary institutional barriers or opportunities to success. Second, electoral rules and systems are relatively concrete and straightforward. Certain mathematical equations determine the likelihood of success and failure. These reasons, however, should not suggest that electoral systems are more important than the state form.

Electoral systems and rules can play the role of gatekeeper for party landscapes. In Duverger's seminal *Political Parties* (1954), electoral rules are discussed as having both mechanical and psychological effects. Mechanically, parties can be denied seats and/or the opportunity to find electoral success, depending on the proportionality of the system. Voting rules can create scenarios in which winning over a certain proportion of the electorate does not guarantee seats in parliament.²⁶ If a system is majoritarian, for example, small parties are often not represented. Psychologically, such rules can dissuade voters from casting votes for certain parties. Simply put, "the more a system favours larger parties and discriminates against smaller ones, the more likely it will be that voters will choose to favour a larger party than waste their votes on the smaller competitor" (Carter 2002, 127).

Carter (2002) makes the distinction between type of system and specific rules. Type of system relates to whether seats in an election are distributed proportional to the vote (like Spain, Germany, etc.) or if they are majoritarian systems (like the UK, USA), where there are single-member districts and only a plurality is needed to win the seat. Proportional representation (PR) systems normally feature multi-member districts and lead to multi-party systems and coalition governments (Grofman 2016). Scholars tend to agree that PR systems normally lead to more

proportionality than majoritarian systems and thus help smaller parties gain access to legislatures (Grofman 2016; Carter 2002).

Specific rules in PR systems (like Spain) can include district magnitude, thresholds, and seat allocation systems. District magnitude refers to the size of an electoral district. A district that sends many representatives to parliament is likely to have seats distributed in proportions that match the distribution of the vote closer than a district with few representatives. Thus, higher district magnitude is better for smaller parties. Thresholds can play an important role in keeping small parties out of parliament. For example, many European countries have five percent legal thresholds for gaining representation. If a party were to only win 4.9 percent of the vote, it would not be eligible for any seats in the national parliament. A final distinction in electoral rules is the difference in seat allocation types. Most European systems employ the D'Hondt or Sainte-Laguë method of translating votes into seats. The details of these are not particularly important to this analysis, although it is noteworthy that the D'Hondt method (which Spain uses) mathematically can lead to more electoral distortion (Gallagher 1991).

Each of these electoral rules can lead to disproportionality—or the distortion between vote proportion and seat allocation. Carter (2002) finds that the conventional wisdom on electoral rules as barriers to small party success does not necessarily hold up to more modern empirical testing. However, system featuring a *combination* of rules that lead to disproportional systems does decrease voting for right-wing extremist parties (Carter 2002).

A highly disproportional system hurts smaller parties not only mechanically, but also psychologically. When a party is perceived as not able to overcome electoral barriers to success, voters are likely to consider voting for this party as a “waste” (Hooghe et al. 2006). However, fragmentation (an increase in the total number of parties) and polarization (an increase in seats

held by parties that are more ideologically extreme) can counteract the psychological effects of disproportionality, demonstrating to voters that new or small parties are viable choices (Jackman & Volpert 1996; Carter 2002).

Recently, some of the scholarship on electoral systems has begun to challenge the assumptions and findings of previous generations of work. Among recent critiques include the fact that there is considerable variation amongst PR systems, that mixed systems have grown in importance, and that direct mandates add nuance to electoral systems (Grofman 2016). However, given that Spain follows one of the simplest electoral systems (single-round closed-list PR elections), older assumptions and findings remain relevant in a discussion of electoral barriers and opportunities to Vox's success.

Opportunity in the Spanish Electoral System

Disproportionality can be a barrier for smaller parties when trying to enter into a party landscape. As the following section demonstrates, Spain's electoral rules are relatively unfavorable for smaller parties (Lijphart 1999; Lago & Martínez 2007).

Spain has a closed-list, PR, D'Hondt seat-allocation system with an electoral threshold of three percent. The 350 parliamentarians in the Congress of Deputies (the lower house) are elected in 52 electoral districts. Comparatively, Spain finds itself with a lower district magnitude than many of its European partners. In fact, Spain has been consistently one of Europe's least proportional systems from 1979-1996 (Lipjhart 1999). Figure 4.1 compares single-round closed-list PR systems of European Union member states. Average district magnitude size is calculated by dividing the number of seats in parliament by the number of electoral districts within a country.

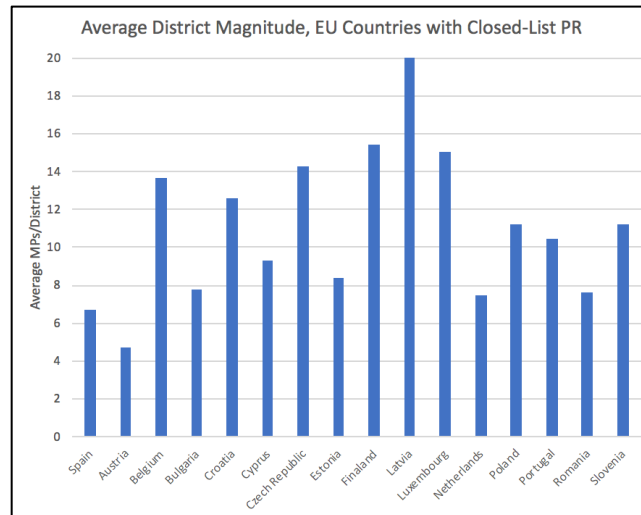
Figure 4.1: Comparing Avg. District Magnitude Across Countries

Figure Calculated and Created by Author

Spain, with an average of 6.73 representatives per district, ranks second lowest among these sixteen countries, behind only Austria. Although Spain's three percent threshold fails as a particularly strong electoral barrier for smaller parties, Spain is on the more disproportional end of the spectrum (Lijphart 1999; Lago & Martínez 2007). In fact, although in Vox's first national electoral success in April 2019 it won 10.3 percent of the vote, Vox seats accounted for only 6.9 percent of the parliament. Just as disproportionality served as a barrier to entry for smaller parties in Spain, even when such parties have found success, they can be significantly disadvantaged by the electoral rules.

The electoral rules in Spain have not changed. Therefore, in understanding where an opportunity may have existed for Vox, attention must shift from the mechanical effects of electoral systems to the psychological effects. These change as a result of individual voter calculations of what constitutes a "wasted" vote.

For voters, Vox's first success at the regional level in Andalusia signified that a vote for Vox in the national election would not necessarily be "wasted." Reif and Schmitt (1980) find that voters are more willing to vote for new parties in "second order" elections. Although Andalusian

electoral rules match the general election rules, regional elections are less likely to have the same psychological discouragement as national elections. Vox was able to gain momentum with a surprising performance in Andalusia before gaining national salience. As described by one spokesperson for Podemos, the Andalusian election “had a trampoline effect” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). The idea that Spain was immune to a right-wing populist party was dispelled at the regional level before Vox was considered a serious national contender.

Vox was also the beneficiary of smaller party performances that broke the two-party Spanish norm in 2015. The successes of both Podemos and Ciudadanos in the 2015 and 2016 General Elections paved the way for Spanish voters to view parties outside of the PSOE and the PP as viable options.²⁷ The success of both of these parties made for a more polarized and fragmented Spanish party system—momentum that worked to Vox’s favor. At that point, the two-party norm had been broken, and a non-moderate party (Podemos) had demonstrated its appeal to the Spanish electorate.

Additionally, the idea of small party voting as “wasteful” seemed less applicable in both 2019 elections. Whereas most Spanish elections have featured close competition between the PSOE and the PP, both 2019 elections seemed clearly to be swayed toward the political left. The motion of censure against the PP Rajoy government in the summer of 2018 was sparked largely by a corruption case within the PP’s ranks (discussed more in Chapter 6). As argued by one PSOE regional parliamentarian, “the sensation that the PP was going to lose the election also helped Vox. Where they could win, Vox voters returned to the PP in the municipal elections. For example, in Salamanca the [Vox] vote went from 12 percent to 4 percent in 28 days” (Interview, Castile and Leon, June 2019). In an election that the PP was not seen as likely winners (the 2019 general elections), voters did not consider choosing Vox over the PP as a waste. One month later,

when the PP had a more realistic chance of winning regional and municipal governments, Vox's performance was significantly weaker.

The April 2019 General Election was an opportunity for Vox because a vote for the party was no longer considered a “waste.” The mechanical barriers presented by the Spanish electoral system were weakened by psychological considerations of a weak PP and an idea that Vox was a serious political contender following the 2018 election in Andalusia. Vox was even more successful in November. The party won 52 seats and over 15 percent of the vote.

Psychologically, a vote for Vox was and is no longer a “waste” following their April performance. Judging from the November 2019 election, electoral rules no longer serve as a barrier to right-wing populist party success in Spain.

Spain's electoral system has been a safeguard for two-partyism and moderation throughout its democratic history. A barrier to success for smaller parties, the electoral system failed in its gatekeeping role when the psychology around “wasted” votes in Spain no longer applied by 2019.

Constitutional Compromise and Spain's System of Autonomies

While electoral rules are clearly defined in law, the Spanish state form is more vague. Although Spain is not a federal system, like Germany, the state is still considered “one of the most decentralized in Europe” (Colomer 1998, 40). The state form is commonly referred to as a “System of Autonomies” although this term is not found in the Spanish Constitution. The Constitution was a negotiated compromise representing the interests of varying political parties at the time, with many provisions intentionally left vague (Moreno 2002).²⁸ The Popular Alliance (AP, predecessor to the PP), the Catalan Democratic Convergence (CDC), and the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) were main competitors in the argument over a unitary versus

decentralized state. The end result was an ambiguous compromise (Colomer 1998, Roller 2002). While the AP advocated for a unitary state that could mirror that of General Franco's dictatorship, regional parties negotiated for more power to lay independently with historic communities. There is little in the Constitution on how the system is actually to function.²⁹

The deal struck is also considered a “political determination to accommodate the cultural and political distinctiveness of Catalonia and the Basque Country” (Grau Creus 2018, 58; Roller 2002). The AP desired stability and cohesion in Spain's democratic transition—a relatively weak position for negotiation (Colomer 1998). Historic nationalities gained special privileges in order to win their acceptance of the new Constitution (Roller 2002). For example, the Basque Country was afforded the privilege to collect their own taxes from their citizens and then transfer a certain amount to the national government, rather than citizens being taxed directly at the federal level. The Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, and Andalusia (and now Valencia) were also allowed to hold non-aligned regional and local elections (Colomer 1998; Guinjoan & Rodon 2014).

Furthermore, regional economic asymmetry (for example, Catalonia and the Basque Country are particularly strong economic performers) can foster grievances based on center-periphery dimensions (Moreno 2002). Such asymmetries can support calls for both greater centralization, which argues for more uniformity via regional redistribution, and greater decentralization, which argues against a reliance on donor/recipient relationships.

A final aspect of the decentralized Spanish system that is noteworthy of a discussion on institutional framework is the Spanish Senate. Like many other European countries, the Spanish Senate holds far fewer powers than the parliament. As a very weak actor in the decision-making process, the Senate does little to represent autonomous communities through legislation (Colomer 1998). What sets this body apart from its European counterparts, however, is the fact

that the Senate has a comparatively weak connection to the autonomous communities. The body is composed of 266 senators: 4 from each municipality and 58 appointed senators from the autonomous community legislatures (Colomer 1998). Nearly 80 percent of the Senate is composed of directly elected representatives that are chosen on the same day as parliamentarians and normally very closely mirror the partisan makeup of the lower house. This lack of connection between the national government and autonomous communities can in part be credited to the vague state form established in the Constitution. Without defining the system of autonomies or each of the autonomous communities when the drafting of the Constitution, there were not clear regions to initially be represented by the Senate (Roller 2002). The Senate therefore does little to effectively connect the national to the regional in Spain.

Altogether, the Spanish System of Autonomies is vague, features privilege for some regions, and lacks a strong connective framework to mediate regional and national priority differences. In the following section, I address how each of these have presented an opportunity for a strongly ethno-nationalist party to gain popularity in 2018 and 2019.

Spain's System of Autonomies as an Opportunity for Extreme Politics

Three aspects of the Spanish System of Autonomies construct an opportunity for extremist politics in regards to the state form and decentralization policy. The first is relatively simple and does not need extensive explanation. The lack of a strong intermediary body between autonomous communities and the national government (a strong and regionally representative Senate) signifies that the Spanish state does not have the most effective channels to navigate regional/centralist conflicts (Colomer 1998; Roller 2002). This could contribute to escalated conflicts with the ability to catalyze extreme opinions, discourse, and policy.

Next, the System of Autonomies has granted certain privileges to particular regions and parties both explicitly in the law and through normative practices in the Spanish party system. Explicitly, by allowing the Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, and Andalusia to hold non-aligned regional and local elections, regional elections often will not mirror the results of a national election. Staggered regional elections grant voters the opportunity to vote in unique settings that may not follow the national trends and campaigns (Colomer 1998). In regions considered historic nationalities, such elections have bolstered support for regional parties (for example: the PNV in the Basque Country). However, in Andalusia—a region with many connections to mainstream Spanish food, dance, lifestyle, and culture—the December 2018 election could be seen as an opportunity for a new party with more extreme nationalist proposals to find success. In each case, staggered elections can be seen as an opportunity to choose parties that do not mirror national elections. This favors regional parties whose interests lie with specific autonomous communities and parties that are not yet represented nationally.

The privileges associated with the System of Autonomies also create a sense of unfairness. Voiced by one Vox party member, “to have majorities, the same on the right as on the left, the PSOE like the PP need to get support from who? From the PNV [in the Basque Country]” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). Such support is conditioned on different governmental powers and/or mainstream parties supporting regionalist candidates for local offices (Colomer 1998). Vox often uses the idea of a privileged regionalist political group as ammunition that supports the idea of a rigged system. The party calls for a foundational “transformation of the state of autonomies into a unitary state of rights that promotes equality and solidarity instead of privileges and division” (100 Medidas, Vox 2019). Political and economic regional asymmetries only add to grievances of regional inequalities.

A third relevant opportunity within the Spanish System of Autonomies for extremist policy is its vague legal grounding. Without particularly well-defined roles of power sharing at different levels of governance, politicians favoring both decentralization and greater national unity can justifiably engage in discourses on both ends of the spectrum. Lacking a strict constitutional mandate, both pro-independence politicians and those far on the nationalist right argue for hardline policy. This is easily seen in the case of Catalonia and its declaration of independence following a referendum in October 2017 (discussed in greater length in Chapter 6). Vox argues for doing away with the System of Autonomies in favor of a completely centralized state. A vaguely defined centralization structure is an opportunity for extremism on both sides.

The Spanish System of Autonomies has always left an opportunity for extreme calls on the nationalist right for centralization. Catalysts responsible for shifting public attention to the centralization issue could theoretically attract voters to these more extreme messages. Before the 2008 financial crisis, support for decentralization had been increasing (Guinjoan & Rodon 2014). Using multiple CIS barometers to track support for decentralization, Grau Creus (2018), however, showed a dramatic decrease in support for decentralization in the last ten years.

The push for independence in Catalonia offers the most recent and extreme catalyst for increased salience of state form debates.³⁰ The 2008 financial crisis is also cited as a catalyst for increasing the salience of the state form issue (Guinjoan & Rodon 2014; Grau Creus 2018).³¹ Reactions to the push for Catalan independence are heavily ideological and identity-driven (Rodon & Guinjoan 2018, Paasi 2009). While support for decentralization is often tied to ethno-regional minorities and opportunities for diverse representation, centralization support is often linked with a homogeneous and unified constituency (Guinjoan & Rodon 2014). Arguments for a more centralized state will invoke a shared cultural identity rather than diversity—a logical

connection between centralization attitudes and Spanish nationalism (Gourevitch 1979).

Following this “identity argument” and building off of Gourevitch (1979), Guinjoan and Rodon (2014) empirically find a strong relationship between regional identification and a preference for decentralization. As a corollary, national identification is tied to a preference for centralization.

Nationalism, Centralization, and Vox Vote Choice

Increased action in Catalonia over independence in 2017, 2018, and 2019 signified a strong challenge to the Spanish state form.³² The System of Autonomies not only created an opportunity for extreme policy in favor of decentralization, but also created grievances in the nationalist/centralist camp. Vox’s November 2019 electoral program begins with a section on “Spain, unity and sovereignty” (100 Medidas, Vox 2019). As its first two policy proposals, the party advocates suspending Catalan autonomy and outlawing political “parties, associations, and NGO’s that pursue the destruction of the territorial unity of the Nation” (100 Medidas, Vox 2019). The program then proposes a transformation of the Spanish State of Autonomies into a unitary state (100 Medidas, Vox 2019). Vox’s first political priority relates to the state form.

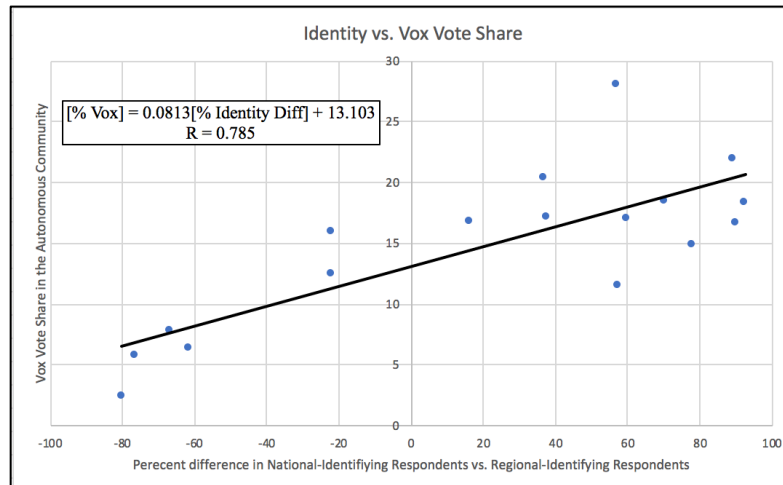
In the frames deployed by Vox (discussed in Chapter 3), there is a constant projection of Spanish nationalism. Vox paints a dichotomous picture of Spanish citizens in relation to the state form. As articulated by one Vox party member, there are “those who want to destroy Spain: the Basque and Catalan separatists,” and on the other side, there is “Vox: a patriotic movement” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). Vox’s nationalism is a *centralist* nationalism. It celebrates the uniformity of the Spanish people—not its regional diversity.

The December 2019 CIS Barometer, used throughout this thesis, does not directly ask for respondents about attitudes relating to the state form. However, using the connection between

nationalism and attitudes towards centralization, testing the relationship between nationalism and Vox vote choice could suggest recent state form contention as an opportunity for Vox. Support for a more centralized state has been growing in the past decade, partially in response to Catalan separatism (Grau Creus 2018).³³ Nationalist voters are more likely to support centralization. While Vox embodies right-wing Spanish nationalism and promotes extreme centralization policy, I am yet to show that nationalist regions and voters support Vox.

I will first examine the relationship between regional identity and Vox vote choice. To visualize this relationship, I use the post-electoral December 2019 CIS. Using the question: “which of the following phrases would you say best describes your feelings,” with the choices of: I feel exclusively Spanish, I feel more Spanish than [of my region], I feel as Spanish as [of my region], I feel more [of my region] than Spanish, or I feel exclusively [of my region], I can assess whether nationalist sentiments are correlated to Vox success in certain regions.

In order to compare regions, I want a measure that incorporates both strong nationalist and regionalist identities. Drawing only from respondents who articulate either a nationalist or a regional identity, I subtract the percentage of Spanish identifying respondents (exclusively Spanish or favoring Spanish) from that of regional identifying respondents (exclusively of their region or favoring their region) for each region. For example, a difference of +100 would signify that a region is overwhelmingly nationalist while a difference of 0 suggests that the region is evenly distributed among nationalist and regionalist sentiments. I compare these differences to the share of the vote won by Vox in the region in the November 2019 election. Figure 4.2 presents this comparison. Each data point represents one autonomous community. Due to limitations of sample size, I exclude Ceuta and Melilla, the two Spanish autonomous cities.

Figure 4.2: Identity vs. Vox Vote Share in the November 2019 Election

Source: CIS Barometer 3269, Figure created by Author

The data present a relatively strong trend. Autonomous communities that overwhelmingly identify as Spanish tend to support Vox at far greater rates than communities with strong regional identification. Voiced by one PSOE spokesperson, “here in Murcia we have a feeling that is more Spanish than other regions and less ‘Murciano.’ Therefore, it is easier to claim...the problem of Catalonia as our own” (Interview, Murcia, July 2019). Regions with strong national identities are logically captivated by issues threatening Spanish unity. The Spanish state form creates an opportunity for grievances. Vox articulates those grievances and offers extreme policy solutions for a receptive nationalist voting bloc.

Not only am I concerned with regional characteristics of Vox’s constituency, but also, I want to address how individual identities influence vote choice. If Vox has capitalized on the grievances created by the Spanish state form, then nationalist voters (who are the most likely to support centralization) will have supported Vox. I therefore test the following hypothesis:

If a respondent identifies as more Spanish-nationalist, then he or she will be more likely to have voted for Vox.

I use the CIS question described in the previous analysis to assess nationalist identification.

Those who feel exclusively Spanish are coded as a 4, those who feel more Spanish than [of their

region] are coded as a 3, those who feel equally as Spanish as [of their region] are coded as a 2, those who feel more [or their region] than Spanish are coded as a 1, and those who feel exclusively [of their region] are coded as a 0. I run an additional test to simplify the results that combines responses to the previous question. Those who feel more (or exclusively) Spanish are coded as a 1. All others are coded as a 0.

As a dependent variable, I use the same binary measure of vote choice used in Chapter 3. Either the respondent voted for Vox (coded as a 1), or the respondent voted for another party (coded as a 0). I also incorporate the socio-demographic control variables discussed in Chapter 3 into this regression. The summary of variables can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Summary of Variables, National Identity Test

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Independent Variable					
Identification with Spain (original)	2.1887	1.0094	0	4	4,446
Identification with Spain (simplified)	0.2258	0.4182	0	1	4,446
Dependent Variable					
Vox Vote Choice	0.1074	0.3097	0	1	3,371
Control Variables					
Sex	0.5154	0.4998	0	1	4,804
Age	2.6109	1.6555	0	5	4,804
Socio-economic Status	2.6717	0.9557	0	5	4,502
Historic Nationality	0.7966	0.4025	0	1	4,804

Source: CIS Barometer, December 2019

I run a two-modeled multi-variate logistic regression to test my hypothesis. Model 1 uses the original data with five categories to measure respondent identity as Spanish and/or as [of their region]. Model 2 simplifies this analysis by only asking whether one feels more Spanish identifying than regional- or neutral- identifying. Results of the logistic regression can be found in the Appendix. I calculate the predicted probability of voting for Vox at various levels of

national identity while holding all other variables at their means. The predictive margins are presented in Figures 4.3 A and B.

Figure 4.3 A:
National Identity vs. Vox Vote Choice

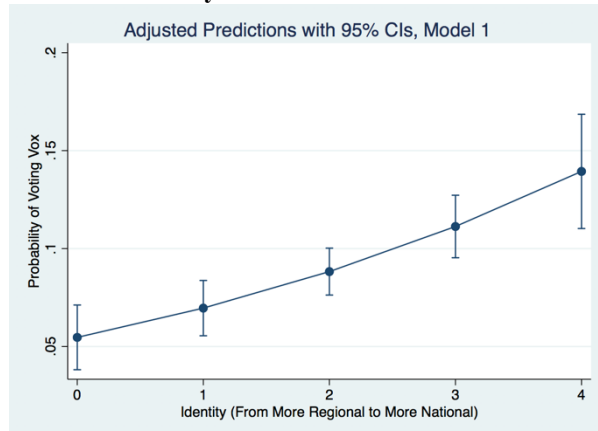
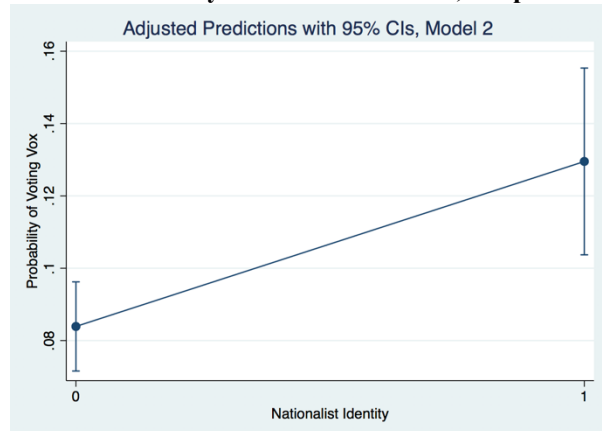


Figure 4.3 B:
National Identity vs. Vox Vote Choice, Simplified



Both models support the hypothesis that a stronger Spanish-nationalist identity increases the likelihood of having voted for Vox. I find a statistically significant relationships between the independent and dependent variables for both models, each with p-values below 0.00. In Model 1, the most national-identifying respondents are about eight- and one-half percentage points more likely to support Vox than the most regional-identifying respondents. In the simplified Model 2, nationalist respondents are four- and one-half percentage points more likely to support Vox than non-nationalist respondents.³⁴

Spain's System of Autonomies—one without a strong bridge between regional and national interests, susceptible to centralist grievances over asymmetries, and with a vague legal principle solidifying the permanence of the system—presented an opportunity in which extreme centralist policy positions could gain popularity. Catalyzed by the Catalan push for independence, support for centralization has grown in the recent political climate (Grau Creus 2018). More nationalist or Spanish-identifying voters typically favor greater centralization

(Guinjoan & Rodon 2014). Vox has capitalized on the growing niche of nationalist voters with grievances towards the state form.

While the legal effects of Spain's electoral system and state form had not changed in the years preceding Vox's breakthrough, the social understandings and catalysts around such issues shifted to favor a new, smaller, and more nationalist party. The psychological barrier of the "wasted" vote phenomenon weakened in Spain. Furthermore, Spain's System of Autonomies continually placed the country as susceptible to extremist policy in both decentralization and unitary discourses. Catalyzed by the Catalan push for independence, those who feel especially Spanish and/or nationalist can find a home in Vox and their extreme anti-decentralization discourse.

Chapter 5

Party System Opportunities

This chapter examines medium-term party system political opportunities that explain Vox's rise in the current political moment (Arzheimer & Carter 2006). I analyze supply-side explanations in Spain that can account for party system changes. Rather than focus on voting demands, I examine the options that voters have to choose from. Opportunities within a party system depend on the ideological position of parties within a landscape and the ways in which that landscape is organized (Kitschelt 1995; Abedi 2002). Positional opportunities relate to ideological placement of parties on established axes of party competition. Organizational opportunities refer to the classification and number of existing parties in the party marketplace.³⁵

Positioning Trends as Party System Opportunities

When parties fail to represent ideologies of large groups of voters, a new party can gain popularity by filling such an electoral niche. Positioning trends in party system opportunities relate to ideological position shifting over time. Such shifts in positions should be discussed with three points of emphasis: cooperation with political opponents, programmatic and policy changes, and voter perception of ideological movement. Before discussing these trends within the Spanish party system, this section re-visits the literature in order to understand how the populist right-wing can benefit from ideological position shifting.

First, party cooperation with political opponents can signal a lack of ideological commitment to voters. The clearest example of cooperation is found in the case of Grand Coalitions. Arzheimer and Carter (2006) find that when a government is made up of a Grand Coalition, the probability of an extreme right vote in the following election is nearly doubled. In studying German Grand Coalitions, Scarrow (2012) similarly finds that in the modern context,

federal elections following Grand Coalitions are likely to feature more electoral volatility (signifying a net shift in support for all parties), an increased number of parties gaining votes, and a rise in protest voting—each of which help a new party on the extreme end of the political spectrum. When center-right and center-left parties position themselves in cooperation (and symbolically close together), politicians come to be “seen as components of a basically undifferentiated political class” (Abedi 2002, 553). Cooperation can signal a betrayal of ideology and values. Accordingly, this creates an opportunity for populist parties on either extreme of the political spectrum to gain credibility as true representations of left or right ideology.

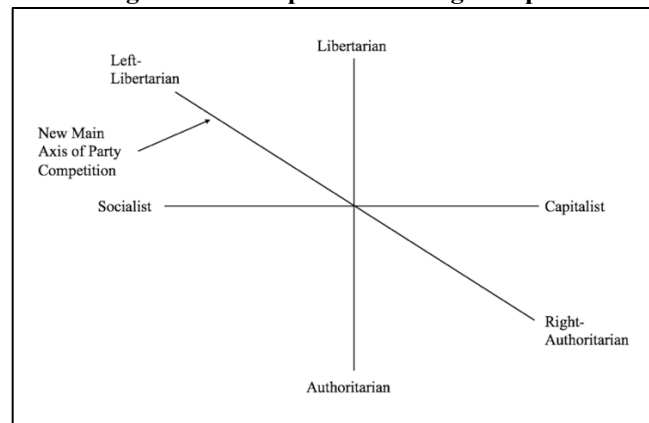
Grand Coalitions do not guarantee a true ideological position shift of a party, given that cooperation and negotiation do not require a party to change its values and ideology. However, they do often signal a shift in position to voters who may conceptualize ideology and a willingness to compromise as one in the same. A Grand Coalition is the most visible case of mainstream party cooperation. In systems that normally lack coalition governments, less formal practices may signal cooperation. As Laver and Schofield (1990) argue, for example, “for cases in which the difference between an abstention and a vote against the government is crucial to [the government’s] viability,” abstention signals cooperation to voters (67). Accordingly, much of the same logic—that Grand Coalitions act as catalysts for ideologically more extreme parties to gain success—can be applied to the Spanish case.

When examining ideological positioning, whether in relation to concrete policy shifts or perceptions of ideological movement, the traditional notions of “left” and “right” must be conceptualized. Downs (1957) originally conceptualized left-right political ideologies as based on the disagreements over how much the government should intervene in the economy. The right favored little intervention, while the left envisioned the government as a necessary body for

regulation. Following the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, new questions of political ideology surfaced as class alignment (working class favoring the economic left) weakened (Huber and Inglehart 1995). Today, there is very little agreement amongst scholars about the left-right locations of specific parties and there is even less agreement as to secondary dimensions of ideological positioning as it relates to each country (Huber and Inglehart 1995). Such secondary dimensions change depending on the country of focus. These could include a traditionalist/progressive scale, an authoritarian/democratic scale, or a scale of xenophobia, for example.

Further complications arise considering that ideological scales need not be one or two dimensional. For example, it is quite possible that a country conceptualizes its parties on economic/capitalist-socialist, social/authoritarian-libertarian, and partisan/populist scales, necessitating a three-dimensional framework for ideological positioning.

However, Huber and Inglehart (1995) still find that the left-right language continues to be used and broadly understood (although country-context-specific issues often serve as the indicators). Therefore, it can still be useful to conceptualize ideological position shifting in relation to more general economic and social axes. Kitschelt uses two axes to spatially conceptualize political ideology (1995). These include a socialist-capitalist scale and a libertarian-authoritarian scale. Modern patterns in party competition are defined by the left-right line featuring left-socialist-libertarian ideology and right-capitalist-authoritarian ideology (Kitschelt 1995). A simplified recreation of Kitschelt's 1995 conceptualization can be found in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Competitive Ideological Space

Source: Author's adaptation of Kitschelt (1995, 15)

Although parties will often stray from this line of party competition (for example, although Ciudadanos in Spain is staunchly capitalist, their social policy is more libertarian), using such an ideological dividing line can be useful in visualizing party system positioning opportunities. In defining the opportunities associated with ideological position shifts, Kitschelt (1995) notes the difference between vote maximizing and office maximizing for center-right parties. A shift to the right will appeal to supporters who are more sympathetic to authoritarian-right messaging, thus maximizing such votes. However, a shift to the center/left will likely make the party important for governing coalitions and the formation of policy. When a center-right party attempts to “office-maximize,” space then opens in the party landscape for new right-wing populist parties to capture the votes of those sympathetic to authoritarian-right messaging.

Alternatively, Arzheimer and Carter (2006) find that a move to the right by moderate parties can actually help right-wing populist parties. While such moves are motivated by recapturing this more extreme proportion of the electorate, they may actually legitimize the extreme-right policies and thus help right-wing populists enter into the political mainstream.³⁶ Thus, the questions must be asked: has the PP ideologically shifted positions (either in policy or

perception), in what direction has it shifted, and does this movement create an opportunity that has benefited Vox?

A Very Brief History of the Popular Party

When the behavior of existing parties does not supply voters with attractive options, space in the party landscape may open for new challengers. As this pertains to the PP, the dominant party on the right “had always included the far-right” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019; Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser 2014; Raimundo 2013).³⁷ One Podemos regional parliamentarian similarly commented that “debates that [he] can have with Vox, [he has] already had with the PP” (Interview, Murcia, July 2019). With the PP occupying the entire ideological space of the political right, there was no space to the right of the PP for another party.³⁸

The PP is a successor of the Alianza Popular (AP, Popular Alliance), a party founded during the transition from dictatorship to democracy. The Popular Alliance, under the leadership of Manuel Fraga, led the opposition to Felipe González’s PSOE governments beginning in 1982. The party was reformed and renamed the Popular Party in 1989. Party members elected José María Aznar to lead the newly reformed PP beginning in 1990.

Aznar shifted the PP closer to the center, with moves somewhat mirroring the Third Way leftist politics of Tony Blair in the UK and Gerhard Schröder in Germany (Hamann 2005). Such ideological movement mostly followed along the lines of economic policy including the PP’s relationship with unions and pensions.³⁹ Ideological position shifting was part of Aznar’s fight for the democratic legitimacy of the Spanish Right, especially considering the continuity of the AP/PP’s leadership with former allies of the Franco regime (Hamann 2005). His leadership signaled a move away from Franco and brought about the first PP-led Spanish government from

1996-2004. Aznar had brought the PP to occupy the “grand space” of the Spanish Right (not only the center-right, but also leaving room for the more extreme wing). While slightly favoring the center-right, the PP still featured party members and parliamentarians that fit more into the authoritarian-right mold (Raimundo 2013). Many of these party members later exited the party, disenchanted with the PP and looking for a more ideologically extreme right in Vox.

The PP’s policy and ideological positioning

Aznar’s movement of the PP towards the ideological center, while still being a “catch-all” party, failed to mobilize a significant backlash movement on the right.⁴⁰ Along with the PP’s broad appeal, its position as a governing party has often instituted a tempering effect on its discourse and policy. As explained by a spokesperson for the PSOE:

When you do not have political power, you can critique whatever you want. But when you are in the institutions, where there are more people who voted for you in the country, you have to deal with the political problems that they have. You can’t just fool around with: ‘I am going to defend Bullfighting from the threat of the Left’ when we have eight million people in Catalonia—nearly a European country—saying that they want to leave. (Interview, Murcia, July 2019)

The PP, which has the responsibility of governance in many autonomous communities and has held power in the national government for nearly eleven of the first twenty years of this century, aims its political focus at mass issues that are the most pressing in Spain. The PP carry a responsibility to work within institutions and with other political players. These are important to keep in mind when discussing Vox’s ascent. As a party free of governing responsibilities, Vox is free to champion the extreme authoritarian-right ideologies and issues that the PP is hesitant to embrace.

The PP’s responsibility in governance fosters a reasonable pathway for cooperation between the party and its leading opponents: the PSOE. Cooperation between mainstream parties

can bolster anti-establishment messages and signal that mainstream parties lack a commitment to true right or left ideologies (Arzheimer & Carter 2006; Laver & Schofield 1990). In the Spanish case, the government has never been comprised of a Grand Coalition. In fact, there have been almost no coalitions of any type in the process of government formation throughout the country's democratic history (barring the current exception, a PSOE-Podemos coalition).

Spain has normally operated with minority governments led by either the PP or the PSOE. While coalitions are especially rare and against the Spanish political tradition, abstentions in government investitures have demonstrated a commitment to cooperation in Spain.⁴¹

Following a failed government investiture in 2015 and a return to the polls in 2016, the PSOE agreed to abstain from the vote of investiture that would solidify Mariano Rajoy and the PP as the leaders of government. Such a political move, in a country that has no tradition of coalitions in government formation, symbolizes a commitment to cooperation between the two mainstream parties. Thus, the PSOE's act to ensure that a government could be formed may still produce the effect (albeit lesser) of Grand Coalitions. Rajoy's government term beginning in 2016 was built on a willingness of cooperation between mainstream parties.

The effect of the cooperation described here was a blurring of the ideological line between the PP and the PSOE. Rajoy, Spain's president from 2011-2018, was seen as not far enough on the authoritarian-right for many voters. An examination of PP policy and programs, however, does not signify a significant ideological shift under either Rajoy or Pablo Casado, the current president of the PP.

Comparing surveys between 2014 and 2017 from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (which surveys academic experts on party positions), the PP's "Left-Right" overall ideological ratings have barely shifted. In 2014, the party was rated a 7.14 out of 10, while in 2017, it received a

rating of 7.33.⁴² The party has remained consistently pro-EU and restrictive on immigration in each dataset (Polk et al. 2017).

While the PP is not rated as centrist (5), Rajoy was criticized for his government's handling of specific social issues. For example, as one Vox party member asserted, “there are certain laws that come from the Zapatero era (Spanish President for the PSOE from 2004-2011) ...Mariano Rajoy on the “right,” maintained them” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). Specifically, abortion, gender violence, and historical memory—all of which relate to Zapatero-era laws—have been criticized by staunch conservatives as areas that the Rajoy government underperformed. The actual record of the Rajoy government in each of these policy areas demonstrates an attempt to roll back Zapatero's progressive policies. However, for some on the right, these attempts were interpreted as weak and non-committal (Jan 2019; Field Research 2019). Table 5.1 compares the Rajoy government's handling of three key laws with that of the current PSOE government.

Table 5.1: The Rajoy Government in 3 Major Social Policy Areas

Issue	PP/Rajoy Action (2011-2018)	PSOE/Sánchez Action (2018-Present)
Abortion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of a major amendment to the 2010 Abortion law (that guarantees access to safe abortion for all women) that would heavily restrict abortion access, returning to pre-2010 law. • Amendments were dropped as the PP failed to reach a full consensus • The only changes to the law made it so that minors seeking abortions required parental permission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While there has been no concrete reversal of Rajoy's move, the PSOE-Podemos coalition agreement signifies that all women should have access to legal abortion in the same interpretation as the 2010 law. • Suggests a potential reversal to the Rajoy government's move
Gender Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Police specifically dedicated to gender violence decreased from 1,555 in 2012 to 1,322 in 2017 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of National Police specifically dedicated to gender violence increased to 1,763 in 2019

Historical Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defunding of projects related to the 2007 Historical Memory Law • Funding for Historical Memory dropped from 6.2 Million euros in 2011 to 2.5 Million euros in 2012 • In 2014 and for the remainder of the Rajoy term, National Historical Memory funding at 0 euros 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2019, under the PSOE government, spending on Historical Memory increased to 15 Million euros • In a major act relating to Historical Memory, General Francisco Franco's body was exhumed from the Valley of the Fallen in October of 2019
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Sources: Junquera (2013), Marcos & López-Fonseca (2018), Junquera (2019), Ortega Dolz (2019)

Abortion, gender violence, and historical memory are all contentious policy areas that are fought on a clear left-right social dimension in Spain. The Rajoy government failed to deliver lasting structural change to progressive social policy instituted under Zapatero.

Following a motion of censure in 2018 relating to a corruption scandal (discussed in greater length in Chapter 6), Rajoy's government fell and he was replaced by Pablo Casado as the leader of the PP. Casado signified a rightward move for the party, branding Rajoy as soft (Rodríguez 2019). This could be seen as a "vote-maximizing" strategy in line with Kitschelt's (1995) conceptualization.

The PP's electoral program for the April elections reflected some of the issues that were popular in the more authoritarian-right discourse. It is significant that the PP placed the issue of Catalan independence at the top of their program, similar to Vox's electoral program (Elecciones Generales, PP 2019). The explicit reminder of Spanish as the primary language to be used in all public education and administration demonstrated another priority shared between the PP and Vox. Historical memory, too, was cast in a negative light, citing that it only generates division (Elecciones Generales, PP 2019). As Arzheimer and Carter (2006) argue, a move to the right by a center-right party can legitimize the populist right-wing.

The PP and Casado changed their tone between April and November elections, reconfiguring themselves as a party of cooperation, moderation, and responsibility. Casado reaffirmed the PP's position as a center-right party, noting that "there is no way to replace the PP as the head, heart, and lungs of the Spanish center-right" (PP Twitter, 23 Sep. 2019). Casado repositioned the party as one of reason and responsibility. The November PP program began with the claim that the party has "acted with responsibility and coherence. [The party has] offered dialogue without exclusion to try to unblock the political situation" (Por todo lo que nos une, PP 2019, 3). The Party later noted that "Spaniards demand a return to consensus, agreement, and dialogue and to pass the page of an age marked by exclusion, division, and conflict" (Por todo lo que nos une, PP 2019, 8).

Not only did the PP present itself as a party of responsibility and governance, but specific language and policy foci took a slight turn away from their rightward momentum under Casado. In reference to the unity of Spain and the Catalan push for independence, the November PP program first notes the constitutional guarantee of the structure of autonomous communities (Por todo lo que nos une, PP 2019). This directly contrasted the PP from Vox, which hope to dissolve the autonomous system in favor of a unitary state organization.

Consistent in both the Rajoy and Casado eras were a lack of commitment to hardline social conservatism. For example, in both the April and November programs, the PP accepted that gender violence was an issue that required action and that the law should not be gender-blind.⁴³ The PP, unlike Vox, accepted the idea of positive discriminatory measures in some policy areas. The argument that Rajoy's government was not resistant enough to social progressivism could similarly be applied against Casado's PP. Put simply, Casado did little to re-strengthen the PP's social conservative credibility.

Vox, alternatively, opposed the idea that the law should correct for societal imbalances that disproportionately affect more vulnerable subgroups. On social policy, there are obvious differences between the two parties. While the PP often felt compelled to straddle both sides and was reticent to discount demands for progressive policies, the clarity of Vox stands in stark contrast and makes it an attractive option for voters against social progressivism.

Kitschelt (1995) has argued that ideological position shifting towards the center (or “office-maximizing”) can create an opportunity for a more authoritarian-right party to capture voters feeling disillusioned with the mainstream party. While Casado’s leadership briefly signified a move to the right that may have legitimized Vox in the run up to the April elections, Vox’s emergence is an indicator that the PP has lost the claim to represent the “true right.” Among Vox’s claims, moreover, is that voters on the right have been abandoned by “the establishment.”

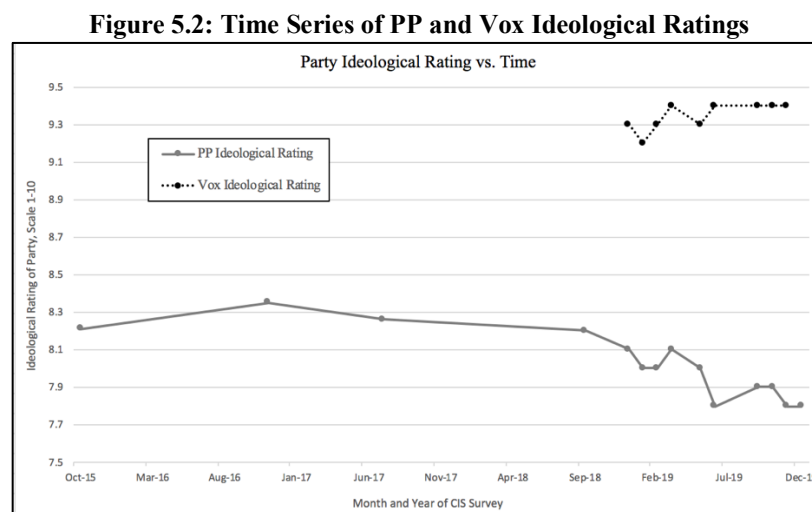
Perceptions of the PP’s ideology

Accusations that the PP sold out the right are far more pronounced than the actual policy shifts suggest. Across the political spectrum there is a consensus that Vox has capitalized on voters’ disenchantment with the PP (Field Research 2019). From one PSOE spokesperson: Vox “has come to occupy the space of those who feel that the PP have abandoned them” (Interview, Murcia, July 2019). From a Vox party member: “The PP completely abandoned their citizens” (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019).

One regional parliamentarian for Vox notes: “I see the PP, who is supposedly on the right...defend the same [policies] that the PSOE defends” (Interview, Valencia, July 2019). For voters on the authoritarian-right end of the political spectrum, the PP has moved too close to the

center (Kitschelt 1995). In Vox’s political discourse and on social media platforms, the Party often refers to the PP as the “cowardly right (*derechita cobarde*). While the PP is thought to be afraid of promoting authoritarian-right policy and discourses—subsequently moving the Party towards the center—Vox is unafraid to champion what others deem politically incorrect.

Public opinion data reflects the sentiment that the PP has ideologically moved closer to the center. Figure 5.2 draws on multiple CIS surveys to track ideological ratings of the PP over time. Respondents were asked to place major political parties on a scale of 1 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). Vox’s emergence in 2018 and 2019 aligns with a drop in the PP’s ideological perception. Respondents note a clear ideological separation between the two parties, with Vox as the stronger authoritarian-right option.



Source: Multiple CIS Barometers, October 2015 – December 2019

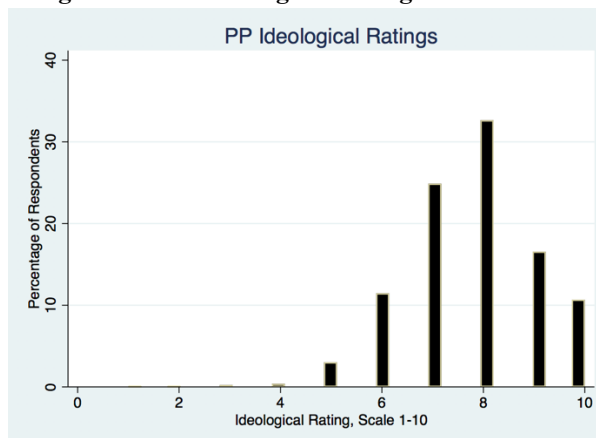
Although perceptions of the PP moved slightly to the left in 2018 and 2019, this does little to provide evidence as to whether Vox has capitalized on shifting perceptions of ideological positioning. The shifted perception of the PP’s ideological stance creates an opportunity for Vox, a party that fills the authoritarian-right space on the ideological spectrum.

To examine whether Vox has capitalized on this opportunity, it is essential to know whether voters who perceive PP’s right-wing ideological position as a relatively weak are more

likely to support Vox. To test this relationship, I use the December 2019 “post-electoral” CIS and run a two-modeled multi-variate logistic regression test.

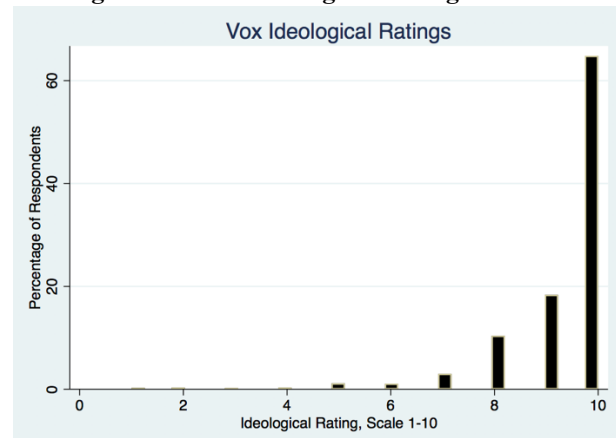
For the independent variable, Model 1 uses an ideological rating scale ranging from 1 to 10 to assess perceptions of the PP, with 10 signifying the view of the PP as an extreme right party. Model 2 simplifies the data to more easily conceptualize this phenomenon. Model 2 groups the PP’s ideological rating into two categories created in reference to ideological ratings of both the PP and Vox displayed in Figures 5.3 and 5.4.

Figure 5.3: PP Ideological Ratings



Source: December 2019 CIS Barometer

Figure 5.4: Vox Ideological Ratings



Source: December 2019 CIS Barometer

The average rating of the PP is a 7.8, while the average rating of Vox is a 9.4. I draw a distinction between those rating the PP between a one and an eight—signifying a perception that the PP is a “centrist” or “center-right” party, and those rating the PP as a nine or ten—signifying a perception of the PP as a “right” or “extreme right” party. As seen in Figure 5.4, most respondents rate Vox as either a nine or ten on the ideological scale. Rating the PP ideologically the same as the majority of Vox placements suggests a view of the PP firmly on the right. In Model 2, I therefore code those who rate the PP as “right” or “extreme right” as a 1, while those rating the PP as “centrist” or “center-right” are coded as a 0. This categorization is, of course,

subjective. However, it is still useful to have a simple, binary picture of the PP's ideological positioning and the impact such perceptions have on vote choice.

As a dependent variable, I use the binary measure of vote choice used in previous chapters. Either the respondent voted for Vox (coded as a 1), or the respondent voted for another party (coded as a 0). Those with no preference are removed from the sample. I include the socio-demographic variables discussed in Chapter 3 as controls. A summary of the variables can be found in Table 5.2.

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Independent Variable					
PP Ideology (Full)	7.7746	1.3046	1	10	3,979
PP Ideology (Simplified)	0.2724	0.4453	0	1	3,979
Dependent Variable					
Vox Vote Choice	0.1074	0.3097	0	1	3,371
Control Variables					
Sex	0.5154	0.4998	0	1	4,804
Age	2.6109	1.6555	0	5	4,804
Socio-economic status	2.6717	0.9557	0	5	4,502
Historic Nationality	0.7966	0.4025	0	1	4,804

Source: CIS Barometer, December 2019

I run a two-modeled multi-variate logistic regression to test the impact of perceptions of the PP on vote choice for Vox. Following Kitschelt's (1995) logic that a shift towards the center by a party on the right will assist parties further on the right, I test the following hypothesis:

If a voter is to place the PP as more ideologically centrist, then he or she is more likely to have voted for Vox.

Results of the logistic regression can be found in the Appendix. I calculate the predicted probability of voting for Vox at various PP ideological ratings while holding all other variables at their mean. The predictive margins are presented in Figures 5.5 A and B.

Figure 5.5 A:
PP Ideological Perception vs. Vox Vote Choice

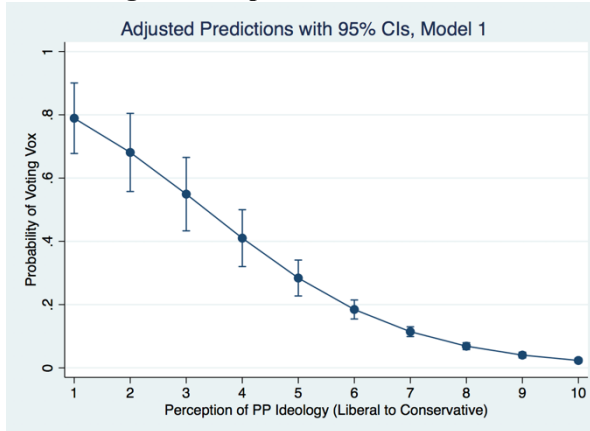
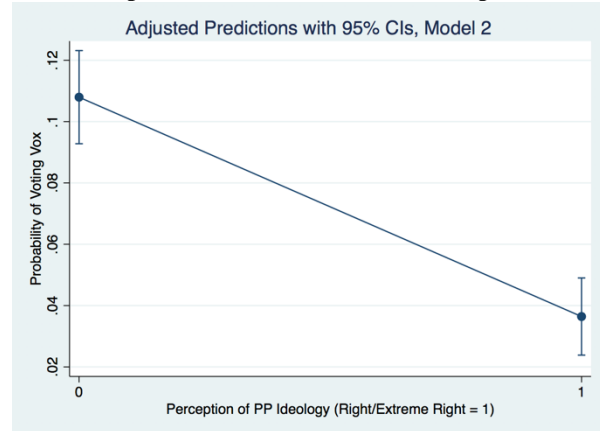


Figure 5.5 B:
PP Perception vs. Vox Vote Choice, Simplified



Both models confirm the hypothesis that rating the PP as more ideologically centrist (or leftist) increases the likelihood of voting for Vox. They each produce statistically significant results with p-values below 0.00. If a voter on the right perceives that the PP has “sold out” a true right/conservative/authoritarian ideology, then he or she is more likely to vote for a party staunchly committed to such values (here, Vox).

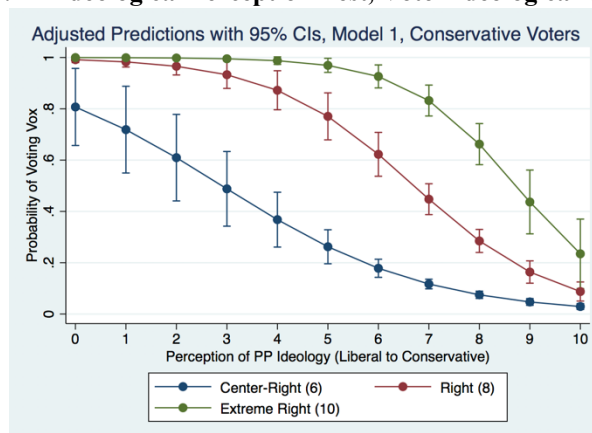
The picture from Figure 5.5 A may overplay the effect of this perception. Remember from Figure 5.3, very few people actually rate the PP as a leftist party. Such people—those rating the PP as more on the left than the right (here, rating the PP between a one and a four)—support Vox at extremely high rates. Because this represent only a small proportion of respondents, though, it may be more telling to observe the difference between those rating the PP as closer to center-right than the right. Respondents rating the PP as a seven compared to those rating the PP as an eight are about four- and one-half percentage points more likely to support Vox. Respondents rating the PP as a six compared to those rating the PP as a seven are seven percentage points more likely to support Vox. Respondents rating the PP as a five compared to those rating the PP as a six are ten percentage points more likely to support Vox. The more on the center/left a respondent rates the PP, the more likely he or she is to support Vox.

Model 2 demonstrates the same phenomenon. Between those who rate the PP as “centrist” or “center-right” versus those who rate the PP as a “right” or “extreme right” party, the respondent rating the PP as more moderate is more than seven percentage points more likely to vote for Vox.

Even more telling, however, is whether this effect is especially strong amongst conservative voters. If the perception of the PP as having “sold out” true conservatives is important in Vox’s breakthrough, then the explanatory power the PP’s ideological perception should be strongest amongst conservative voters. Therefore, I also want to test the following hypothesis:

The explanatory power of ideological perceptions of the PP are strongest amongst the most conservative voters.

To test this hypothesis, I again run a multi-variate logistic regression. This time, though, I include an interaction term between a measure for self-reported ideology and PP ideological perception. Self-reported ideology is coded from one to ten, with a one being especially on the left and a ten being especially on the right.⁴⁴ I run the regression with same variable testing PP ideological perception used in Model 1. Respondents rate the PP on a scale of 1 (extremely leftist) to 10 (extremely rightist). This allows me to test whether rating the PP as more moderate and being an ideological conservative combined increases support for Vox. The results of the regression can be found in the Appendix. Figure 5.6 shows the predictive probability of voting for Vox for respondents who identifies as either center-right, right, and extreme right, while holding all other variables at their means.

Figure 5.6: PP Ideological Perception Test, Voter Ideological Comparison

Increased voter conservatism strengthens the explanatory power of PP ideological perceptions on Vox vote choice. In this model, the PP ideological rating variable is no longer statistically significant (p-value of 0.54). However, the interaction between PP ideological rating and respondent ideology is significant (p-value below 0.006). Therefore, rating the PP as moderate alone does not necessarily explain Vox vote choice. However, being conservative and viewing the PP as ideologically moderate helps to explain Vox vote choice. This would suggest that amongst conservative voters, the PP is no longer a viable conservative option.

The margins between each ideological rating of the PP between a score of six and ten—a range of perceptions of the PP from centrist to extreme right—are larger for more conservative voters. For example, for the most conservative voters (extreme right), rating the PP as an eight compared to rating the PP as a nine corresponds to 22.55 percent increase in likelihood of supporting Vox. For voters with an ideological rating of eight (right) and six (center-right), this jump corresponds to a 12.12 and 2.78 percent increase in likelihood of supporting Vox, accordingly. Essentially, Vox has capitalized on the sentiment of PP ideological movement within the more conservative voting bloc.

Perceptions of the PP have shifted slightly towards the center in 2018 and 2019, as demonstrated in Figure 2. Whether this be based on real policy shifts in the PP or not, such a

shift in ideological position perception explains one opportunity that Vox has capitalized on. Simply put, more voters hold the perception that the PP is closer to the center than before. Holding this perception increases the likelihood of voting for Vox.

Organizational Trends as Political Opportunities

Not only are party system opportunities defined by the ideological space available on the axis of party competition. They also include the organization of the party system itself. Relevant to the Spanish case are two organizational phenomena: the number of parties and the types of parties.

Concerning the number of parties, the literature suggests that the mere presence of parties can induce system changes. A system with more parties will likely feature more polarization than a system with fewer parties (Sartori 1976; Jackman & Volpert 1996; Abedi 2002). An increased number of parties will likely represent more diverse interests and policy positions, leading to more ideological distance between the most extreme parties on either end of the political spectrum.⁴⁵ Sartori (1976) also argues that increasing polarization leads to instability, suggesting that established parties and norms are not guaranteed to maintain their influence. Put simply, adding to the number of parties in a party landscape can lead to a domino effect leading to even more parties.

Applying this knowledge to the Spanish case, it is necessary to understand Vox's success in reference to both Spain's bi-polar tradition for the first 30 years of its democracy, and the country's increased number of parties in recent years. Following both Podemos' and Ciudadanos' electoral successes in the 2015 General Election, the Spanish party system grew from a two-party to a four-party system.⁴⁶ The literature suggests an increase in parties will

create polarization and instability in a party system, a favorable opportunity for a new party advocating more extreme policy positions (Sartori 1976; Jackman & Volpert 1996; Abedi 2002).

The breakthrough of Podemos and Ciudadanos created an opportunity for further change to the party landscape in elections following 2015. Explanations for the rupture of Spain's two-party tradition in 2015 largely point to the 2008 financial crisis as the strongest catalyst for party system change. The beginnings of Podemos emanated from a cry that elites were mishandling the crisis and thus leaving behind their citizens (Kioupkiolis 2016; Zarzalejos 2016). The breakthrough of Ciudadanos on the national level has similarly been credited to the handling of the financial crisis, as well as corruption associated with the PSOE and the PP (Rodríguez Teruel & Barrio 2015). As one regional parliamentarian for the PSOE notes, "the 2008 crisis was so hard, [there was a] sensation that people were doing horribly but the politicians [from the PSOE and the PP] were beneficiaries that took advantage of others in the hard situation" (Interview, Castile and Leon, June 2019).

The barriers to a right-wing populist party were still strong enough to prevent the rise of Vox in 2015, but the two-party system had nonetheless transformed. The increasing number of parties from 2011 to 2015 created a more polar and unstable party system—an important opportunity that Vox seized in the subsequent elections.

Aside from the increased number national contenders in Spain's party landscape, regional parties in the national parliament also create an opportunity for nationalist grievances. Koev (2015) argues that the presence of parties that represent ethnic minorities in Central and Eastern Europe have encouraged a nationalist backlash united around a perceived ethnic threat. Regional parties in Spain may create an opportunity for a similar backlash.⁴⁷ Regional parties protect distinct languages and cultures outside of the Spanish mainstream, whereas Vox advocates for a

culturally unified Spain, and, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, has earned votes from the Spanish-nationalist voting bloc.

Thirty-two seats in the national parliament are currently occupied by regional parties that advocate for Catalan or Basque independence. The very presence of these regional minority parties in the national parliament creates frustration for those who prefer a distinctly Spanish Spain. The organization of the party system, which includes space for regional minority parties, creates an opportunity nationalist backlash.

This chapter has discussed multiple political opportunities that developed in recent years that help to explain Vox's breakthrough. Organizationally, the growing number of parties in Spain has presented a more polarized and unstable system. Parties advocating for more regional diversity and even regional independence also created an opportunity for a nationalist backlash.

Vox has also benefited from the behavior of the PP in recent years. The Rajoy government of 2016 was confirmed through a PSOE abstention during the investiture, signifying cooperation and dialogue with the left that could make authoritarian-right voters uneasy. While the PP has not significantly shifted ideological positions, the Party's weak reaction to social progressivism under Zapatero serves as fuel for the claim that the PP has sold out the right. Empirical tests presented in this chapter demonstrate that Vox has capitalized on the perception that the PP has moved ideologically away from the authoritarian-right. The notion of positional shifts towards the center by established parties recalls the dynamics identified by the Modernization Thesis discussed in Chapter 2. Not only are voters left behind by globalization, the economy, and social liberalism; the PP is perceived to have left behind the especially conservative segment of its voting base.

Chapter 6

Short-Term Contextual Opportunities

The third tier of political opportunity examines the especially salient issues in Spain that offer explanations for the rise of Vox. If Vox can claim ownership over certain issues, the party will gain support when such issues become more important to voters (Budge & Farlie 1983; Bélanger & Meguid 2008). In the following chapter, I discuss how Vox has come to “own” five issues that have recently gained salience. I then show that voters who are concerned with such issues tend to support Vox.

Short-Term Contextual Political Opportunity Structure

Before discussing the specific issues that are driving vote choice for Vox, it is necessary to briefly revisit the literature on short-term contextual opportunities. Following the framework of Arzheimer and Carter (2006), the final tier of political opportunity incorporates the specific issues that are relevant in driving populist right-wing vote choice. Recall that the Modernization Thesis points to economic frustrations (which often include an element of immigrant scapegoating) as a catalyst for populist right-wing party emergence (Betz 1994; Mudde 2016).⁴⁸ Arzheimer and Carter (2006) similarly note that immigration and unemployment are consistent right-wing populist foci. While economic grievances and immigration are central in Vox’s issue framing, it can be argued that such frustrations were salient long before Vox’s breakthrough. Specific to the Spanish case, grievances arising from socially progressive policy and contempt for separatist movements add to issue-based explanations of why Vox emerged when it did.

Issue-based opportunities rely on a political party claiming competence, experience, or expertise when offering solutions to pressing problems. Gaining such a status has less to do with intellectual debate over issues than it has to do with issue promotion (Rydgren 2010). New media

landscapes (mainly social media) allow parties to control their own messages and promote particular issues. When a party increases the attention and time dedicated to an issue, it can claim “ownership” in certain policy areas (Budge & Farlie 1983).

Winning ownership entails convincing voters that a party is best able to handle certain issues (Petrocik 1996). In Spain, for example, the PSOE is perceived as the “owner” of welfare issues (Alonso et al. 2013). Ownership is often won by building an established record of credibility and competence (Bélanger & Meguid 2008). However, a new party like Vox is unable to stand on a concrete political record. Instead of demonstrating competence, it can win associative ownership over issues (Walgrave et al. 2012). Increased association between parties and issues has been demonstrated as politically useful for these newer parties (Lachat 2014). Repeated problem identification can yield a perception of a party that is inseparably tied to certain issues.⁴⁹ Vox, who claimed no voting record before their admittance into national and regional congresses, was still able to gain ownership over certain issues through association.

Issue ownership alone is insufficient in explaining why populist right-wing parties gain popularity. The effect of ownership is dependent on the salience of the issues (Bélanger & Meguid 2008; Walgrave et al. 2012). If an issue is not especially salient, owning that issue will do little to increase a party’s vote share. However, the combination of ownership with issues that are especially salient can drive vote choice for a new party. Simply put, if voters care about an issue, and that issue is owned by Vox, then they will be more likely to vote for Vox.

Salience and Ownership

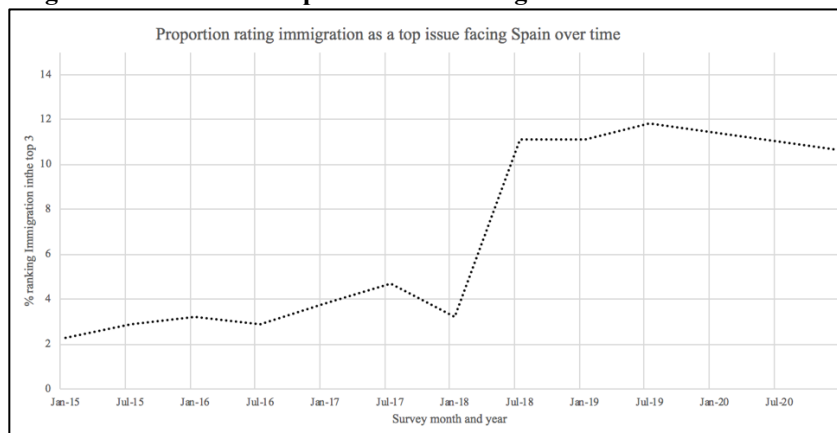
In this section, I show that immigration, the situation in Catalonia, corruption, gender violence, and historical memory have gained increased national salience since 2018. I argue that Vox

claims ownership over these issues on the right. When considering issues that have driven right-wing populist popularity in the past, Arzheimer and Carter (2006) find that unemployment, too, is central to right-wing populist party successes. For this reason, I include unemployment in the possible issues relevant to Vox's success.⁵⁰

Immigration

Spain was once considered to be very sympathetic towards immigrants. A 2017 Eurobarometer question about general attitudes towards immigrants found that only 26 percent of Spaniards believed that immigration was more of a problem than an opportunity for the country, twelve points below the EU average (European Commission 2018). Spain's sympathy towards immigrants is rooted in its own political history. As Encarnación (2004) argues, "Spain's history as a sender rather than a recipient of foreign workers helps explain the accommodating response of many social institutions in Spain to the problem of immigration" (176). However, concerns over immigration have risen in 2018. Figure 6.1 uses the CIS "Most Important Problem facing Spain" (MIP) question, to empirically demonstrate this rise. The MIP question allows respondents to select the top three issue that Spain is facing.

Figure 6.1: Perceived Importance of "Immigration Problem" over Time



Source: CIS barometers, January and July, 2015-2019, December 2019

Those citing immigration as a top three issue in Spain rose from around 4 percent at the beginning of 2018 to around 11 percent from the middle of that year to the present.

One potential catalyst for the changing public opinion could be socialist President Pedro Sánchez's decision to welcome over 600 migrants rescued at sea in June of 2018. The decision, often referred to in the media relating to "Aquarius"—the name of one of the three vessels carrying migrants—sparked controversy as the boats had previously been turned away in Malta and Italy. The Spanish government promised the migrants healthcare and an investigation into each case of asylum. Under Sánchez's more open policy, nearly 25,000 migrants, three times the level in 2017, entered Spain by sea in the first seven months of 2018 (Chislett 2018, 16).

In response to the Sánchez Government action, there were demands on the right to put "Spain first." As one Vox party leader explains, the humanitarian action "is good, but it is good only when the basic necessities of those [already] here are covered" (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). Such a framing is deployed by Vox to argue that other parties, even those on the right, care more about humanitarianism than Spaniards. Immigration is also used by Vox as a springboard for anti-Islam messaging. Figure 6.2 is a tweet from Vox President Santiago Abascal in which he offers that "Islam is a political project incompatible with Europe." However, Vox supports legal immigration of migrants from "nationalities that share language and important ties of friendship and culture with Spain" (100 Medidas, Vox 2019). By focusing on "Spain first," and being the only party explicitly against immigration by Muslims, Vox is seen as the exclusive owner of the immigration issue for those who seek the harshest regulations.

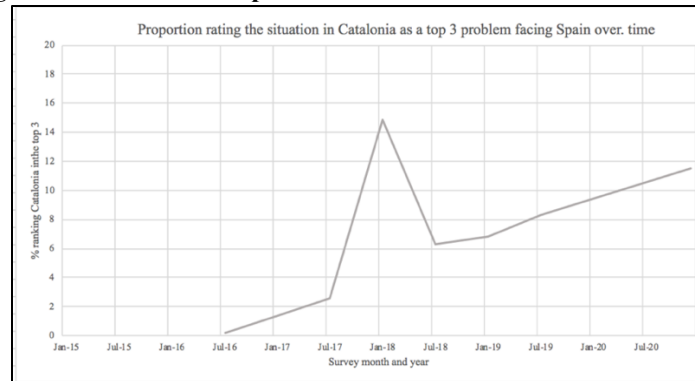


Figure 6.2: Islam and Europe From Santiago Abascal's Twitter, 20 April 2019

Catalonia

Another issue that has unquestionably gained salience is the battle over Catalan independence. In 2003, the proportion of Catalans in favor of independence was about 15 percent (Colomer 2016, 957). However, support for the independence movement rose, ultimately bringing the region to a tipping point. On September 6 and 7, 2017, the Catalan Regional Parliament passed two laws that confirmed a referendum on independence set for October 1 and that ensured that the result would be binding (Bernat & Whyte 2019). Although declared illegal, Catalan officials still held the referendum. The scene turned violent with confrontations between voters and police. Ultimately, turnout was significantly hindered and those favoring independence overwhelmingly won the referendum. The PP government under Rajoy subsequently enacted Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, wherein the central government took charge of the Catalonia and imposed direct rule. Catalonia re-held regional elections in December 2017, with pro-independence parties winning a majority of parliamentary seats.

The issue of independence has remained contentious in both Catalonia and greater Spain. For example, 86 incidents of physical violence by Spanish nationalists in Catalonia were recorded between September 8 and December 1, 2017 (Bernat & Whyte 2019, 2). Tensions flared again with the October 2019 court ruling sentencing nine independence leaders to jail times ranging from nine to thirteen years for their actions surrounding the referendum. Figure 6.3 uses the same “Most Important Problem” question to track the salience of the situation in Catalonia.

Figure 6.3: Perceived Importance of “Catalonia Problem” over Time

Source: CIS barometers, January and July, 2015-2019, December 2019

Interestingly, Pablo Casado, now the leader of the PP, initially came out with harsh rhetoric condemning the situation. In relation to the referendum, Casado said, “whoever declares [independence] could end up just like the one who declared it 83 years ago” (Díez 2017). Casado was alluding to Lluís Companys, the Catalan premier jailed in 1934 for declaring independence, who was later executed in 1940 by the Franco regime. Casado to later qualified that he only meant the jailing part of Companys’ history—not the execution. The PP has since demonstrated a more moderate position on Catalonia in comparison to Vox.⁵¹

Vox offers the most extreme solutions to the Catalan independence crisis. The party advocates for banning separatist parties and applying harsh criminal sentences for those implicated in the push for independence. Vox’s prescriptions are not limited to the region of Catalonia. The party calls for a foundational “transformation of the state of autonomies into a unitary state of rights that promotes equality and solidarity instead of privileges and division”—the most drastic policy response of any party in Spain (100 Medidas, Vox 2019).

Corruption

Corruption has been a concern of Spaniards for many years (Heywood 2007; Jiménez & Caínzos 2012). Most recently, 29 businesspeople and party officials associated with the PP were

convicted on corruption accounts in May 2018. The case, referred to as Gürtel, related to a secret campaign fund from 1999 to 2005 that was built from bribes for municipal contracts (BBC, 24 May 2018). Most notably, Luís Bárcenas, a former treasurer of the PP, received a 33-year sentence for his implication in the scheme. Following the ruling, the Rajoy Government was brought to a motion of censure, causing Rajoy to step down and shifting power to the PSOE in June of 2018.⁵²

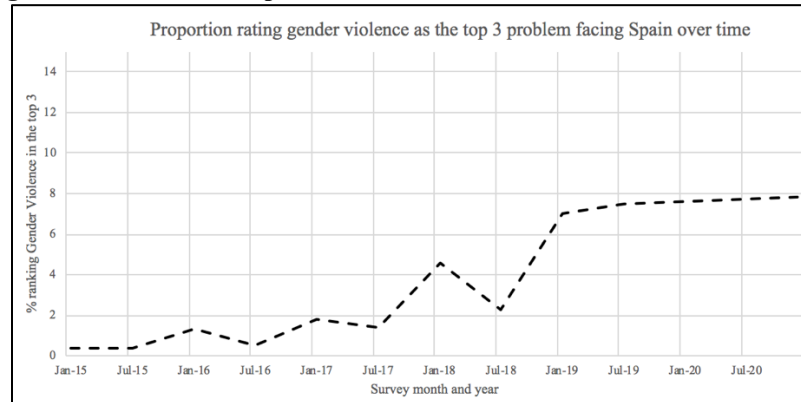
Vox can be viewed as the anti-establishment party of the right. The party is an alternative for conservative voters who feel that the PP represents a “corrupt elite.” Vox frames other parties as having betrayed the people of Spain (Field Research 2019). One of the strongest sources of this sentiment of betrayal is corruption—a focus of many right-wing populists across the world (Mudde 2019).

Gender Violence

The issue of gender violence has also increased in national salience in 2019. In 2004, Spain passed a gender violence law under the socialist Zapatero Government. The law refers specifically to violence experienced by women as well as the special treatment it deserves under the law given its unequal frequency and intensity compared with violence against men (BOE 2004). Although in effect for over a decade, the law is still contentious, with Vox arguing that it is “totalitarian” and “ideological.” The issue of gender violence gained salience with a landmark Spanish legal case referred to as “la Manada”—in which five men brutally attacked and raped an 18-year-old woman at the Running of the Bulls festival in Pamplona in 2016. The case returned to the national spotlight when the defendants were released on bail in June 2018 (but sentenced back to prison in December), strengthening the mobilization of a large Women’s March on

March 8, 2019. Vox was the only party not to participate in or support the march. Figure 6.4 uses the CIS “Most Important Problem” question to track the salience of gender violence.

Figure 6.4: Perceived Importance of “Gender Violence Problem” over Time



Source: CIS barometers, January and July, 2015-2019, December 2019

Gender violence is often central to Vox’s platform through its framing of “the progressive dictatorship.” In his closing remarks during the November 2019 electoral debate, Abascal argued that Vox wants to “defend freedom against the progressive dictatorship that divides Spaniards, that pretends that women must face off against men, and that wants grandchildren to condemn their grandparents” (2019). Abascal tied the issue of gender violence to contention over historical memory policy in Spain. In these issues, Vox is uncompromising and unapologetic. With the only president out of the five major national parties who has specifically declared himself against feminism, Vox represents the strongest resistance to social progressivism.

Historical Memory

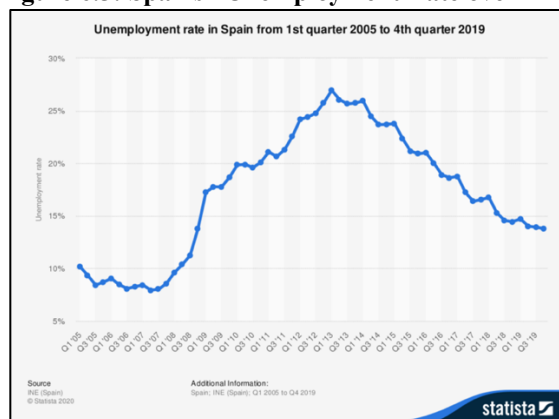
Vox’s resistance to the “progressive dictatorship” also includes its opposition to historical memory policy. Historical memory refers to the ways in which Spain officially remembers its history of the Civil War (1936-1939) and the subsequent dictatorship under General Francisco

Franco (1939-1975). Under the Zapatero government, Spain passed a historical memory law in 2007 which expanded rights and compensations for the victims of Francoism and the Civil War. The law formally recognized many different aspects of the Franco regime as “unjust” or “illegitimate.” Among a long list of mandates, the law featured the creation of a Historical Memory Documentation Center, promised government assistance for individuals seeking to exhume improperly buried relatives, and addressed Franco-era monuments and symbols (BOE 2007). Historical memory has recently gained salience when President Sánchez announced his intention to exhume the body of Franco from the celebratory monument, the Valley of the Fallen, in June of 2018.⁵³ Following a long legal battle, the exhumation was finally carried out on October 24, 2019. The political right condemned the decision as overly divisive and unnecessary.

Vox again claims ownership over the opposition to historical memory policy. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Vox advocated for abolishing Zapatero’s law (not just defunding it, as the Rajoy government had). Vox—a party whose elected representatives include former military generals under Franco—owns the issue of historical memory for those who do not seek to condemn the dictatorial past. It frames historical memory as a battle between freedom of thought and totalitarian indoctrination.

Unemployment

Unemployment in Spain has been a central economic concern in the 21st century. Following the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent bursting of the Spanish housing bubble, unemployment rose to close to 30 percent. Peaking in 2013, the Spanish unemployment rate has gradually decreased, today hovering around 14 percent (Eurostat 2019). Figure 6.5 tracks Spanish unemployment rates from 2005 to 2019.

Figure 6.5: Spanish Unemployment Rate over Time

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/453410/unemployment-rate-in-spain/>

High levels of unemployment continue to be a concern, with almost 60 percent of CIS respondents including unemployment as one of the top three issues facing Spain in December 2019. However, this does not deviate significantly from previous perceptions of unemployment as a pressing issue in Spain.

Not only has unemployment failed to increase its national salience, but also it is not an issue that Vox “owns.” Vox is a liberal economic party which prefers a minimalist approach to government intervention, low taxes, and a minimized bureaucracy. However, Vox does little to push economic issues through its discourse or social media platforms. Instead, it touts accomplishments in relation to immigration restriction and social conservatism, condemn the situation in Catalonia, and disapprove politicians whom the party deems as corrupt (Field Research 2019). I include this discussion of unemployment and economy to test an aspect of the uniqueness of the rise of Vox in the European context. If unemployment has little to do with the rise of Vox, Spain is once again a European exception: a right-populist party whose rise has little to do with the economy.

2018 and 2019 were years when new issues gained national salience, presenting an opportunity for parties to claim issue ownership. Vox claimed associative ownership over harsh

immigration, anti-corruption and anti-elitism, concern over Catalonia, resistance to gender violence laws, and resistance to historical memory laws. Vox has benefitted from these contextual opportunities by filling gaps where no existing party on the had a strong claim of ownership.

Quantitatively testing issue-based vote choice

The quantitative analysis in this section seeks to understand the relationship between issue priorities and vote choice. Due to constraints with the December 2019 CIS, I am forced to do two separate tests. The first test uses the “Most Important Problem” (MIP) question, which asks “what is the principle problem that exists in Spain” and allows for respondents to give a first, second, and third answer. I compile these data to count any respondent that ranks an issue relevant to this study in their top three as a voter who thinks the certain issue is especially important. Absent from this question is an option to voice historical memory or reconciliation with the Franco past as a primary issue facing Spain.

The MIP question serves as a proxy for voter priorities. I code each issue as binary: either the respondent notes that the issue is a top three problem facing Spain, or that it is not. I code those who do not view the issue in the top three as a 0 and those who do as a 1 for four independent variables (“immigration,” “Catalonia,” “corruption,” and “unemployment”). I expect that respondents who place “immigration,” “Catalonia,” and “corruption” as especially important to be more likely to have voted for Vox. With “gender violence,” I expect those who place the issue as especially important to be less likely to vote for Vox. This is because Vox has ownership over the “resistance” position in relation to gender violence laws. Because I am trying to explain why voters chose Vox, I hope to keep the direction of these relationships positive. I

therefore code those who view gender violence as a top issue in Spain as a 0, and those who do not as a 1 (the reverse of the other four variables).

Using the MIP fails to capture the effect of historical memory and the exhumation of Franco on vote choice. However, the CIS features two questions that directly address whether certain issues “had an influence on [a respondent’s] vote choice in November” (CIS 2019). These include the exhumation of Franco and the situation in Catalonia. I include both of these questions in a second regression, such that historical memory can be included in the discussion of salient issues that drive vote choice for Vox. The magnitude of the relationship in the Catalan MIP question can be compared to the magnitude of the “Catalan Influence” question as to compare the relative findings from the first and second regressions. I would expect potentially different results using the two questions because the “influence question” prompts a respondent to specifically confront an issue, whereas the MIP asks a respondent to elect relevant issues themselves. I again code the Catalan and Exhumation “Influence” questions as binary. Those who state that the issue did influence their vote choice in November are coded as a 1 while those who state that the issue did not influence their vote choice are coded as a 0.

As a dependent variable, I use the same binary measure of vote choice used in previous chapters. Either the respondent voted for Vox (coded as a 1), or the respondent voted for another party (coded as a 0). I also incorporate sex, age, socio-economic status, and the binary measure for historic nationality status of a respondent’s autonomous community (as discussed in Chapter 3) as control variables.

A summary of the variables can be found in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1. Summary of Variables, Voter Priority Test

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Independent Variables					
(MIP) Immigration	0.0997	0.2996	0	1	4,804
(MIP) Catalonia	0.1155	0.3197	0	1	4,804
(MIP) Corruption	0.2032	0.4024	0	1	4,804
(MIP) Gender Violence	0.9221	0.2680	0	1	4,804
(MIP) Unemployment	0.5849	0.4927	0	1	4,804
Catalonia Influence	0.2315	0.4218	0	1	4,782
Exhumation Influence	0.0573	0.2324	0	1	4,783
Dependent Variable					
Vox Vote Choice	0.1074	0.3097	0	1	3,371
Control Variables					
Sex	0.5154	0.4998	0	1	4,804
Age	2.6109	1.6555	0	5	4,804
Socio-economic Status	2.6717	0.9557	0	5	4,502
Historic Nationality	0.7966	0.4025	0	1	4,804

Source: CIS Barometer, December 2019

I run a two-modeled multi-variate logistic regression analysis to address the significance, magnitude, and direction of the relationships between issue importance and vote choice. Model 1 uses the MIP question discussed in the previous section. This only addresses four out of the five issues of interest in this chapter. Model 2 seeks to address the remaining issue: historical memory. It uses the “influence” question while calling attention to both the issue of Catalan independence and Historical Memory.

In Model 1, I test five hypotheses:

- 1-3. If a voter places [1. immigration, 2. the Catalan independence movement, or 3. Corruption] as a top three issue facing Spain, he or she is more likely to have voted for Vox.*
- 4. If a voter DOES NOT place gender violence as a top three issue facing Spain, he or she is more likely to have voted for Vox.*
- 5. If a voter places unemployment as a top issue facing Spain, he or she is more likely to have voted for Vox.*

In Model 2, I test two additional hypotheses:

6. *If a voter claims that the situation in Catalonia affected their vote choice, he or she is more likely to have voted for Vox.*
7. *If a voter claims that the exhumation of Franco affected their vote choice, he or she is more likely to have voted for Vox.*

Results of the logistic regression can be found in the Appendix. Each figure below shows the predicted probability of voting for Vox based on voter prioritization of these issues, with all other variables held at their means. The predictive margins are presented in Figures 6.6 A, B, C, D, E, F, and G.

Figure 6.6 A:
Immigration Priority vs. Vox Vote Choice (MIP)

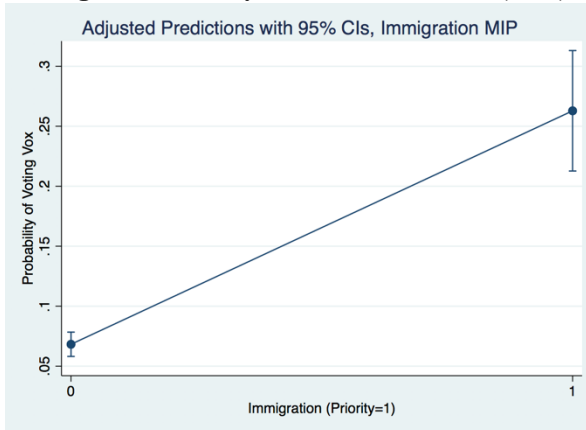


Figure 6.6 B:
Catalonia Priority vs. Vox Vote Choice (MIP)

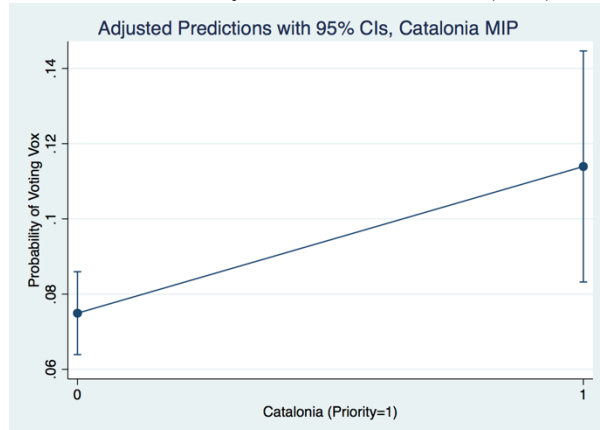


Figure 6.6 C:
Corruption Priority vs. Vox Vote Choice (MIP)

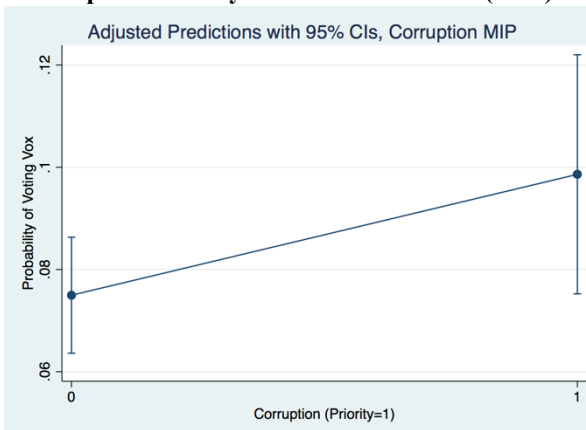


Figure 6.6 D:
Gender Violence Priority vs. Vox Vote Choice (MIP)

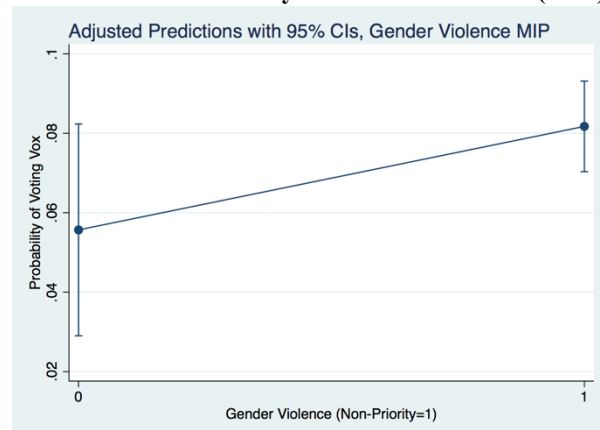


Figure 6.6 E:
Unemployment Priority vs. Vox Vote Choice (MIP)

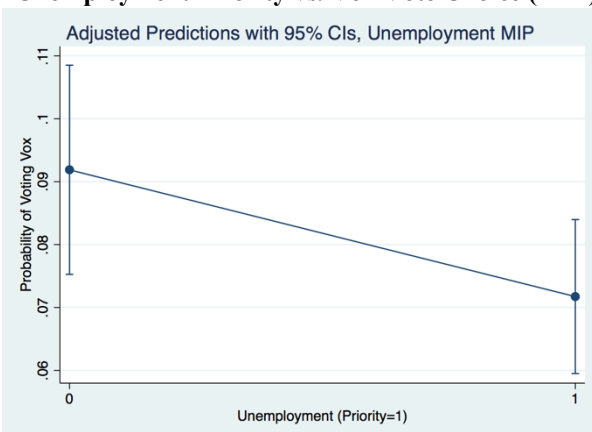


Figure 6.6 F:
Exhumation Influence vs. Vox Vote Choice

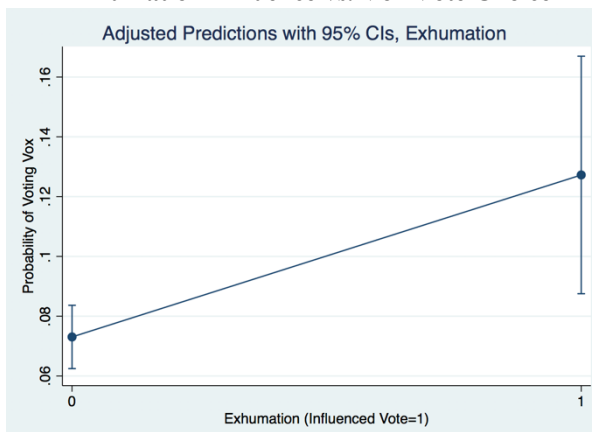
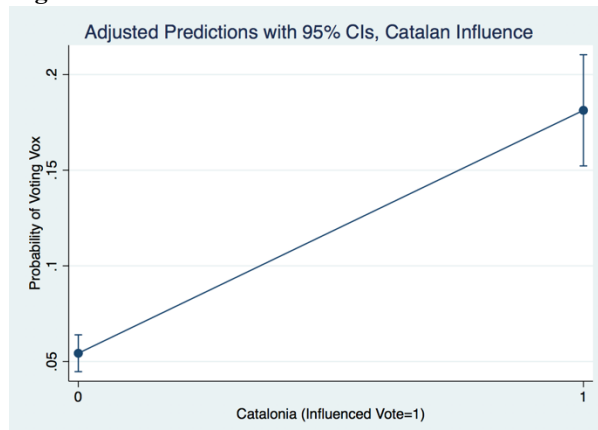


Figure 6.6 G: Catalan Influence vs. Vox Vote Choice



In Table 6.2, I compare the predictive margins of these relationship. I also show the p-value for each independent variable.

Table 6.2: Predictive Margins (in percentages) on Vox Voting, Issue Priority Test

Variable	Predictive Margin	P-value
Immigration (MIP, Model 1)	19.47	0.000***
Catalonia (MIP, Model 1)	3.90	0.005**
Corruption (MIP, Model 1)	2.37	0.038*
Gender Violence (MIP, Model 1)	2.60	0.117
Unemployment (MIP, Model 1)	-2.02	0.028*
Exhumation (Influence, Model 2)	5.41	0.001**
Catalonia (Influence, Model 2)	12.70	0.000***

*Note: *** $p < 0.00$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$*

Model 1 demonstrates statistically significant relationships confirming the first three hypotheses posed. I find positive relationships between ranking immigration, Catalonia, and corruption as top three issues facing Spain and vote choice for Vox.

I find that citing immigration as a top issue increases the probability of having voted for Vox by 19.47 percentage points. Citing Catalan independence as a major issue facing Spain increases the probability of having voted for Vox by 3.90 percentage points. Citing corruption increases that likelihood by only 2.37 percentage points. In comparing the magnitudes of these relationships, Model 1 suggests that the impression of immigration as a major problem in Spain is the strongest issue in predicting Vox voting.

I also find a positive relationship between not citing gender violence as a top issue facing Spain and the probability of having voted for Vox. While not placing gender violence as a top issue increases this probability by 2.60 percentage points, the result is statistically insignificant. However, because gender violence is often grouped into a greater category of “the progressive

dictatorship,” the issue may still be important in contributing to a greater Vox discourse centered on the idea of cumulative social progression.

Model 1 suggests that the direction of the relationship between rating unemployment as a top problem in Spain and vote choice for Vox proposed in Hypothesis 5 is actually reversed. This would suggest that concern over unemployment, in the Spanish case, fails to explain support for Vox. This logically aligns with the finding in Chapter 3 that those of a higher socio-economic status are more likely to vote for Vox. Put simply, the economy does not appear to be a top priority for Vox voters. Furthermore, because unemployment has not recently increased in its national salience, it contributes very little to the understanding of Vox’s success. Its inclusion in this regression is based in previous explanation’s for right-wing populist successes. Model 1 demonstrates that the Spanish issues associated with Vox’s success deviate somewhat from economic explanations common in right-wing populist party successes across Europe.

Model 2 confirms Hypotheses 6 and 7. Those whose votes were influenced by the situation in Catalonia were about 12.70 percentage points more likely to have voted for Vox compared to those who did not consider Catalonia in their vote choice. Respondents whose votes were influenced by the Franco exhumation were 5.41 percentage points more likely to support Vox.

To explain the difference in results between the two models, one should consider that a Vox voter may care about a certain issue but not rank it as a top three issue facing Spain. Therefore, a Vox voter whose vote is influenced by the situation in Catalonia may still not place the issue in his or her top three. It is then not surprising that the magnitude of the relationships in Model 2 are greater than those of Model 1 (for example, the Catalonia “Influence” question produces a result that is almost three times greater than that of the MIP version). It is therefore

necessary to qualify the result of the exhumation question. While Model 2 demonstrates that the issue is relatively strong in predicting vote choice, under the MIP model it may not be as strong.

Across both models, the findings confirm the suspected directions of each relationship (excluding the unemployment test). While immigration appears to be the best predictor of vote choice for Vox, Catalonia, corruption, and the exhumation of Franco also all produce statistically significant results. These are issues owned by Vox on the right. Considering that they have each gained salience in the past two years, it becomes clear that Vox has capitalized on catalytic events that have pushed these issues to the front of the political stage. Voters who care about such issues (an increasing number given their recent salience) are more likely to vote for Vox. Vox has found electoral success partially because it fills the growing voter niche concerned with these issues.

Adding to the Issue Palette

Spain was thought to be immune from populist right-wing parties despite the country's high unemployment rates following the 2008 crisis and its status as a frontier state with high levels of migration. The results from this analysis suggest that while unemployment fails as an explanation for Vox's breakthrough, concern over immigration played a significant role in driving Vox's success. However, pressures felt from migration in 2015 and 2016 did not materialize in right-wing populist success in Spain. Instead, the country has only now reached a tipping point where accumulated pressure from migration has brought more citizens to view immigration as a problem, fueling the success of Vox. Spain has lagged behind many of its European neighbors in this way. Ultimately, the country is less "exceptional" than once thought. Spain is not immune from xenophobia and anti-immigrant discourses gaining popularity.

The capitalization on corruption as a contextual political opportunity also places Vox in a larger context of right-wing populist successes around Europe. Surprisingly, however, corruption was a relatively weaker factor in motivating vote choice for Vox. Instead, Vox's breakthrough seems to be grounded more in xenophobia, Spanish unity, and social conservatism.

The issue of Catalan independence is related to the broader issue of Spanish unity and national pride. Vox is the most nationalist of the Spanish parties, evidenced by its obsession with the flag and frequent mention of Spain's greatness when addressing national unity and Catalonia. Trends in globalization and Europeanization have created frameworks in which right-wing populist parties argue that national sovereignty, culture, and identity are threatened. In the Spanish case, however, this threat is internally driven. Vox stokes fears that Spain is under threat from traitorous forces bent on destroying the country. This offers a new, internally-driven twist on a popular discourse centered on threats to sovereignty and nationhood.

Although I do not find a statistically significant relationship between gender violence and Vox voting behavior, further exploration of framings of gender violence as well as other issues cast under the umbrella of the "progressive dictatorship" add to the literature on right-wing populist breakthroughs. Included in this discussion and empirically demonstrated to be relevant in explaining Vox's rise is historical memory. While not explaining vote choice to the same degree as immigration, Vox's resistance to social progressivism adds to the understanding of the party's success. As the status quo is threatened by social movements (feminism, Women's March, LGBTQ+ rights) as well as government action (the exhumation of Franco, historical memory and gender violence laws), Vox has capitalized on an opportunity to offer concerned voters an unapologetic resistance to liberal progressivism.

Each issue examined here gained national salience in 2018 and 2019, creating political opportunities where no established party on the right claimed ownership over them. Building on the political opportunities that opened up in long- and medium-term structures, Vox's breakthrough can also be attributed to these contextual shifts in issue salience. Those who identify the issues as top concerns facing Spain are more likely to support Vox, demonstrating how the party's ownership over newly salient issues helps to explain recent electoral successes.

Chapter 7 **Conclusion**

In Chapter 1, I described how potential and kinetic energy work in opposition when breaking through a barrier. When an object confronts barrier, that object is unable to break through if its energy is less than that of the barrier. To change this, either the object must gain energy or the barrier must lose energy. This concept is no less applicable to the political arena than to the physical sciences.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that both barriers to entry for a right-wing populist party have lessened in Spain, and that Vox has seized opportunities to gain momentum in recent years. Vox's electoral success came at a time when scholars and politicians thought the country to be "immune" from right-wing populist parties. In 2018 and 2019, however, Vox broke through the barriers that constituted the Spanish exception—namely Spain's aversion to its authoritarian past, its openness towards immigrants and the EU, and its party system that already included space for the extreme right.

The 2018 regional election in Andalusia, the April 2019 General Election, and the November 2019 General Election all represent turning points in Spain's party landscape. Vox represents yet another rupture to the two-party tradition sustained until 2015. It is now the third largest party in the Spanish parliament, bringing a definitive end to the Spanish exception.

In this concluding chapter, I address two remaining questions. First, I compare the relative strength of explanations presented throughout Part II of this thesis. I find that while the ending of the Spanish exception deserves multiple explanations, immigration stands as the strongest explanation of vote choice for Vox. Rising immigration pressures in Spain have given the issue renewed political salience and has driven concerned voters to Vox. The Spanish case therefore suggests that contextual voter demands offer the strongest driving force behind party

landscape change. Second, I offer a brief reflection on where Vox fits in the greater picture of right-wing populist successes around the world. Vox is just one story in a larger global trend but is nonetheless significant and an important addition to existing scholarship on such parties.

Explaining the Rise of Vox

Following Arzheimer and Carter's (2006) three-tiered political opportunity structure, I found multiple explanations for Vox's ascent at the institutional, party system, and issue-contextual levels. Institutionally, changing social interpretations of the voting system shifted the narrative around the 2019 general elections in Spain. The psychological barrier of a supposed "wasted" vote lost relevance in the current political moment, allowing Vox to overcome electoral barriers that favored larger, established parties. Spain's system of autonomies also presented an opportunity for nationalist and extreme-centralist policy. A system that fosters grievances on the political extremes of the centralization issue offers an opportunity for more extreme parties to gain popularity. Sparked by the Catalan push for independence, Vox was able to win votes from the growing group of voters sympathetic to nationalist and centralist arguments.

Within the Spanish party system, organizational trends offered an opportunity for new and polarized parties in 2018 and 2019. The growing number of parties, the increased polarization of the system, and the presence of ethnic minority parties created a favorable environment for a new right-wing populist challenger. Changes to partisan ideological positioning also created opportunities for voter dissatisfaction and realignment. Although the PP has not significantly shifted its policy in recent years, perceptions of the party moving ideologically towards the center have increased, partially as a result of the Rajoy government

failing to accomplish conservative policy aims. Holding such perceptions increases support for Vox, a party firmly committed to unwavering and unapologetic conservative ideology.

Finally, contextual issues offer clear opportunities for Vox. Through its discourse, policy proposals, and issue promotion, Vox has come to “own” certain issues. In Chapter 6, I tracked the rising salience of immigration, the Catalan independence issue, corruption, gender violence, and historical memory. Voters concerned with such issues were more likely to support Vox.

These findings support the idea that the rise of Vox cannot be explained through one single phenomenon. Qualitative findings from the perceptions of Spanish politicians, paired with empirical tests showing the significance of certain opportunities, demonstrate that vote choice for Vox deserves multiple explanations at multiple structural levels. Although I was unable to quantitatively test each of the opportunities presented in these structures, it is still of interest to compare the relative magnitudes of my results where possible.⁵⁴

In Table 7.1, I present the predictive margins found for all binary independent variables throughout Chapters 4-6. This is an imperfect measure of relative importance given that questions used for each independent variable vary and can produce different results. However, by comparing the results of the binary tests, I keep some uniformity across regressions and can still offer some (albeit imperfect) comparative analysis. For each variable (all of which are tied to a specific opportunity present in 2018 and 2019), I present the degree to which a binary change in response can increase the likelihood of supporting Vox. Details of the individual regressions and coding can be found in the variable’s corresponding chapter.

Table 7.1: Predictive Margins (in percentages) on Vox Voting, Master Comparison

Variable	Predictive Margin	P-value
Spanish Identity (Simplified) <i>Chapter 4</i>	4.56	0.000***
PP Ideological Perception (Simplified) <i>Chapter 5</i>	7.16	0.000***
Immigration (MIP) <i>Chapter 6</i>	19.47	0.000***
Catalonia (MIP) <i>Chapter 6</i>	3.90	0.005**
Corruption (MIP) <i>Chapter 6</i>	2.37	0.038*
Gender Violence (MIP) <i>Chapter 6</i>	2.60	0.117
Unemployment (MIP) <i>Chapter 6</i>	-2.02	0.028*
Exhumation (Influence) <i>Chapter 6</i>	5.41	0.001**
Catalonia (Influence) <i>Chapter 6</i>	12.70	0.000***

*Note: *** $p < 0.00$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$*

The results from these tests defend the idea that vote choice for Vox can be explained by multiple opportunities. Nearly all of the tested independent variables produce statistically significant results in the predicted direction throughout the three models. No explanation for the end of the Spanish exception would be complete using just one variable or opportunity to explain Vox's success.

However, as these tests demonstrate, one variable stands out among the rest. Concern over immigration increases the likelihood of having voted for Vox by 19.47 percentage points. The only rivaling relationship concerns Catalonia's influence over vote choice and the likelihood of having voted for Vox (Model 3). However, this relationship is still weaker than the immigration relationship. Furthermore, it uses a question likely to produce stronger results than the MIP question (as discussed in Chapter 6). Spain saw a profound spike in concern over

immigration in 2018.⁵⁵ The issue has since maintained a heightened salience. Vox's discourse and policy ensures that the party "owns" the issue amongst more protectionist voters.

Immigration was found to be the strongest driving force for Vox's success in this analysis.

This finding has important implications in the Spanish case. While economic woes and concern over Europeanization remain unconvincing as explanations for Vox's success, immigration has shown to be especially relevant. Spain was thought to be exceptional *despite* the fact that the country faced large immigration pressures in the 21st century. To find that the Spanish exception was broken partially *because* of growing immigration pressures and xenophobic sentiments suggests that Spain is not so exceptional. Instead, the country fits into a much larger picture of right-wing populist party successes, xenophobia, and immigration. This finding could suggest the prominence of demand-side explanations to right-wing populist breakthroughs. Spain provides evidence for how immunity from such discourses gaining popularity—once thought to exist through structural and cultural barriers—does not exist.

Vox in a global context

Having less than a year in national public office at the time of writing, the consequences of Vox's presence remain largely unknown. In opposition, Vox has consistently argued for the policy preferences outlined in Chapter 3. However, given the left-wing government and Vox's relative size, the party remains largely in the margins. More recently, Vox has proven an uncooperative political player in the Coronavirus Crisis. The party refused to take President Pedro Sánchez's calls, arguing that his incompetence has cost too many lives to merit collaboration. On April 6, 2019, Abascal tweeted that "to support this government is to support the management that has cost thousands of lives [and] millions of jobs" (Twitter 2019).

Unsurprisingly, Vox president Santiago Abascal has maintained the party's xenophobic and politically-incorrect style, referring to the Coronavirus as the "Wuhan Virus" in a press conference on March 31st.

While Vox is still very new to Spain's parliament, its presence adds to the growing space taken up by right-wing populist parties in European legislatures in the 21st century. Some countries, like Poland and Hungary, are even led by such parties. Not only does Vox fit within a European context of rising right-wing populism, but also Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro's presidencies suggest that the phenomenon is global. Vox politicians very much see their political project in line with the goals of President Trump (Field Research 2019). Articulated by one regional PSOE spokesperson, "In the end, the US is a reference for us at all levels. For me it is—if the US is doing well, we are too" (Interview, Murcia, July 2019). Such parallels can be found in Vox's "Spain first" discourse, xenophobic policies, and political-incorrectness frames—to name only a few.

As just one piece of a larger global puzzle, inquiries into the rise of Vox should be added to the vast literature on right-wing populism. While the findings of the previous section may suggest that Vox's rise is not especially unique, here referring to the role of immigration in propelling Vox's ascent, the many explanations for the party's rise presented throughout this thesis offer new areas of attention for scholars studying right-wing populist party breakthroughs.

While Spain's state form and regional asymmetries mobilized separatist support, I have argued that it also presented an opportunity for nationalist parties. This finding is in connection with the push for independence in Catalonia, a situation exclusive to Spain. While external threats to unity, the nation, and sovereignty (globalism and the EU) have garnered significant

attention in the literature, the Spanish case demonstrates how internal disruption on these same dimensions can present an opportunity for right-wing populism.

The Spanish case also draws an interesting comparison to Northern Italy. Lega Nord (now Lega), a right-wing populist party, has advocated for greater regional autonomy and even independence for Northern Italy (McDonnell 2006). Lega is a nationalist party, although it promotes a regional—rather than Italian—nationalism. Center-periphery divisions thus appear influential in multiple case studies, even though right-wing populists can fall on either side of the debate.

Additionally, I have argued that both increased salience of gender violence and historical memory issues have created an opportunity for Vox. While social progressivism has received credit for “leaving some voters behind,” attention to specific social issues could paint a clearer picture of what causes right-wing populist success. With Franco’s exhumation found as a significant driver of vote choice for Vox, future research could look into the direct backlash effects of uncomfortable confrontations with a troubled right-wing past. Grievances that have propelled Vox largely relate to social and cultural momentum in Spain.⁵⁶ An important distinction can be made between right-wing populist parties that thrive on socio-cultural backlash, like Vox, and parties capitalizing on economic dissatisfaction.

The Spanish case presents another iteration of right-wing populist success around the world. Vox provides a complex picture of both convergence *and* divergence amongst right-wing populist movements. This question of convergence and divergence is strong point of emphasis for future research. The multitude of significant explanations for Vox’s ascent, paired with new factors that the Spanish case adds to the literature, suggest that each movement should be

understood on its own. However, after a multi-leveled analysis on the rise of Vox, immigration, while certainly not the only important explanation, seems to be one of the most fundamental causes of the end of the Spanish exception. This finding suggests that Vox and Spain should be understood in the larger global context of right-wing populist successes. Furthermore, the end of the Spanish exception suggests one more strand of convergence across democracies: that no country is truly immune from right-wing populism.

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Sample Interview Template

Questions varied by party and region of the interviewee. These represent the general questions for semi-structured interviews. Depending on the interview and direction of the conversation, questions often strayed from this template. Below are the open-ended questions guiding my interviews.

While quotations included throughout the thesis exclusively represent formal interviews with regional politicians or party workers, much of my research was also informed by conversations in the field with Spanish citizens. These rarely followed a strict template, although questions appearing here often guided our conversations.

Interviews were conducted in Spanish. Below is an English translation of questions.

Vox and its voters

- How would you describe Vox?
- How would you classify Vox on the ideological spectrum?
- Who are Vox voters? Did they come from specific parties in the past?
- Why is [or isn't] Vox's message especially popular in this region?

The Spanish Exception

- Why do you think that Spain did not have a party like Vox on the right for so long?
- What reason or reasons was Vox able to emerge in this moment?
- To what extent to economic issues explain the rise of Vox?
- To what extent does immigration explain the rise of Vox?

The Catalan Push for Independence

- To what extent do you see Vox as an anti-Catalan Independence Party?
- Is Vox the only "unity" party in Spain?
- How much are citizens in this region concerned with the situation in Catalonia?
- If the Catalan Crisis were to be settled, would Vox still have a strong platform?

Confidence in Centrist Parties

- Has the Spanish government worked well for its citizens?
- Do citizens have the right to be unsatisfied with the two-party system?
- Is Vox a result of voter protest against the mainstream parties?
- Are voters tired with PSOE and PP dominance?

Spanish History

- Has Vox opened a conversation on historical memory?
- Does Vox's stance on historical memory resonate with the people?
 - Which people?

- Do people generally care about the PSOE's historical memory politics and the exhumation of General Franco?
- Has the meaning of the "Spanish Right" changed with Vox?

Elections, Vox, and the Future

- How would you characterize the relationship between your party and Vox?
 - Does this relationship change at different levels of government?
- Is there a future in which Vox is a normal and respectable group in Spanish politics?
- What do you expect for Vox and their future success?
- Does Vox fit the pattern of European right-wing populist successes?

Appendix

Chapter 3

Logistic Regression: Socio-demographic Variable and Vox Vote Choice	
Socio-demographic Variables	
Sex	-0.5612*** (0.1186)
Age	-0.2427*** (0.0364)
Socio-economic Status	-0.1161 (0.0641)
Historic Nationality	1.5817*** (0.2475)
Constant	-2.3773 (0.3002)
N	3,175

Note: *** $p < 0.00$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, SE in parentheses

Chapter 4

Logistic Regression: National identity and Vox Vote Choice		
	Model 1 (Original Data)	Model 2 (Simplified)
Independent Variables		
Identification with Spain (Original)	0.2575*** (0.0617)	
Identification with Spain (Simplified)		0.4853*** (0.1297)
Control Variables		
Sex	-0.5765*** (0.1205)	-0.5709*** (0.1205)
Age	-0.2607*** (0.0370)	-0.2609*** (0.0371)
Socio-economic Status	-0.0826 (0.0647)	-0.0832 (0.0646)
Historic Nationality	1.3882*** (0.2531)	1.5314*** (0.2490)
Constant	-2.7711 (0.3196)	-2.4267 (0.3019)
N	2,965	2,965

Note: *** $p < 0.00$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, SE in parentheses

Chapter 5

Logistic Regression: PP Rating and Vox Vote Choice		
	Model 1 (Full Ideological Scale)	Model 2 (Simplified Ideological Scale)
Independent Variables		
PP Ideological Rating (Full Scale 1-10)	-0.5611*** (0.0533)	
PP Ideological Rating (Simplified Scale)		-1.1637*** (0.1925)
Control Variables		
Sex	-0.6255*** (0.1314)	-0.6568*** (0.1287)
Age	-0.2369*** (0.0402)	-0.2336*** (0.0393)
Socio-economic Status	-0.0826 (0.0720)	-0.0879 (0.0702)
Historic Nationality	1.2335*** (0.2662)	1.4005*** (0.2645)
Constant	2.0157 (0.5218)	-2.0906 (0.3234)
N	2,890	2,890

Note: *** $p < 0.00$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, SE in parentheses

Logistic Regression: PP Rating and Vox Vote Choice, Voter Ideological Comparison

Independent Variables	
PP Ideological Rating (Full Scale)	0.1585 (0.2588)
Voter Ideology	1.6659*** (0.3086)
PP Ideological Rating X Voter Ideology	-.1086** (0.0391)
Control Variables	
Sex	-0.6623*** (0.1528)
Age	-0.3790*** (0.0474)
Socio-economic Status	0.1862* (0.0847)
Historic Nationality	0.6273* (0.2968)
Constant	-8.2568 (2.0606)
N	2,833

Note: *** $p < 0.00$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, SE in parentheses

Chapter 6

Logistic Regression: Issue Importance and Vox Vote Choice		
	Model 1 MIP Question	Model 2 Direct Influence Questions
Independent Variables		
Immigration	1.5830*** (0.1444)	-
Catalonia	0.4620** (0.1638)	-
Corruption	0.3002* (0.1450)	-
Gender Violence	0.4119 (0.2627)	-
Unemployment	-0.2695* (0.01224)	
Exhumation Influence	-	0.6151** (0.1804)
Catalonia Influence	-	1.3500*** (0.1284)
Control Variables		
Sex	-0.5302*** (0.1238)	-0.5283*** (0.1231)
Age	-0.2513*** (0.0379)	-0.2315*** (0.0378)
Socio-economic Status	-0.1049 (0.0663)	-0.0248 (0.0669)
Historic Nationality	1.5564*** (0.2512)	1.7572*** (0.2523)
Constant	-3.0083 (0.3984)	-3.3806 (0.3255)
N	3,175	3,161

Note: *** $p < 0.00$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, SE in parentheses

Notes

Chapter 1

¹ Such parties are openly Franquist and fascist. No party fitting this mold has gained over one percent of the vote in national elections (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser 2014; González-Enríquez 2017). Other right-wing parties, like España 2000, are more focused on strict conservatism and a protection of the traditional family. Similarly, they have failed to win a significant portion of the vote.

² The constitution outlined a quasi-federal system of 17 autonomous communities—allowing for regional differences and marking a stark change from Franco’s unified Spanish state (Colomer 1998; Moreno 2002). The new system featured closed list proportional representation for 52 provinces. More details of the Spanish institutional structure are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

³ The term “pacted transition” refers to the many compromises made between different negotiating powers in the transition. These were split along multiple fault lines: right-left, nationalist-republican, and regionalist-centralist, for example. An essential piece of this compromise included a “pact of forgetting” wherein Franco and his dictatorship would not be the focus of political debates or policy for the foreseeable future.

⁴ However, such officials would be constrained within the limits of a new party. With the AP (Alianza Popular or Popular Alliance) and now the PP (Partido Popular or Popular Party), Franquist officials had to operate within the context of a “catch-all” party on the right, rather than the explicitly fascist Falange party under Franco.

⁵ The fall of the UCD can be credited to multiple factors. While the direct aftermath of Franco’s dictatorship called for centrism, moderation, and stability, Spain saw a rise in partisanship in the following years (Barnes et al. 1985). Furthermore, the UCD represented a coalition of smaller parties with distinct ideologies. Inability to work together as well as defections from elites to the PSOE and AP at the time are credited with exposing such divisions and breaking down the party (Hopkin 1999).

Chapter 2

⁶ Such an ultra-conservative reaction can largely be seen in relation to a growing culture war. The New Left inspired a New Right, manifested in parties like the National Front in France and the Austrian Freedom Party. While each of these are now well established, they grew in popularity and structure in the 1970s.

⁷ Established theoretical frameworks for the study of political party successes and performances were reserved for parties considered “normal.” This refers only to mainstream center-right or center-left parties, rather than new challenger parties that may act outside of traditional norms. If right-wing populist parties are somehow abnormal, they cannot be studied with “normal” political science frameworks. However, as Mudde (2010) argues, right-wing populist parties largely do represent “normal” parties. Therefore, Vox is able to be studied with a traditional framework—in this case, political opportunity structures.

⁸ Especially in the case of *right-wing* populism and nationalism, these two phenomena overlap. Both build binary interpretations of society. Nationalism adds another element to the populist “othering” by depicting the “pure people” as a result of their nationality, while the “elite” are a global-thinking force that cares little about the protection of the nation.

⁹ In Chapter 3, I describe the Vox party. In this description it becomes clearer why Vox should be classified as right-wing, populist, and nationalist. Their policy and frameworks demonstrate that such labels are appropriate and not contentious.

¹⁰ In the Spanish case, some of these barriers were described in Chapter 1 in relation to the Spanish exception. These include the two-party norm, an aversion to the authoritarian past, the effects of the amnesty law, and Spain's relationship with the EU. Further barriers are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. These include electoral rules and a party landscape already occupying certain ideological spaces.

¹¹ A discussion of socio-demographic characteristics in relation to the Vox party and its voters can be found in Chapter 3.

¹² Here, demand-side explanations refer to voter appetites. Put simply, what specific policies and messages do voters seek in a party? Supply-side explanations refer to options presented to voters. Here, we ask: what options does the Spanish political system and its party landscape offer to voters? Furthermore, how have such options changed recently?

¹³ Vox is able to claim ownership over certain policy areas because of this associative ownership, discussed in greater length in Chapter 6. Before 2019, the party had no voting record or performance through which to demonstrate its competence. However, Vox practices repeated problem identification (coupled with the most extreme policy responses in comparison to existing parties) in discourse and social media publications.

Chapter 3

¹⁴ Many other right-wing populist parties found increased success in the 2014 European Parliament election. Eurosceptic parties, on both the right and left of the political spectrum, saw unprecedented gains in vote shares from previous elections. Eurosceptic parties comprised twenty eight percent of the overall vote. Most of these gains came in the form of right-wing populist party successes (Treib 2014).

¹⁵ This stands in stark contrast to the rise of the Podemos party in 2011. Podemos was born out of self-organized protest in response to the financial crisis. The movement lacked formal membership and was largely mobilized through online social networks (Anduiza et al. 2014). Vistalegre and Vox, by contrast, was the first large public showing of Vox—an elite organized event (Ferreira 2019).

¹⁶ ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna—Basque Homeland and Liberty) was an armed left-wing Basque-nationalist/separatist group in the Basque country. Violent activity from the group officially ended in 2010.

¹⁷ Throughout the thesis, there will be multiple references to nationalism. In Spain, nationalism takes two distinctive forms: Spanish nationalism and regional nationalism. Spanish nationalism refers to a pride and privilege associated with one's status as a Spaniard. One of the clearest displays of Spanish nationalism is the constant celebration of the Spanish flag. Certain regions can also be home to strong nationalist sentiments. These occur when the region is perceived by its citizens or government as its own nation. The two strongest examples of this in Spain are Basque nationalism and Catalan nationalism.

¹⁸ This refers to the Historical Memory Law passed in Spain in 2007 under the socialist Zapatero Government. It is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. The law is an attempt to begin to reconcile with the Spanish dictatorial past. The political right, and especially Vox, have been very critical of the law.

¹⁹ Vox's focus on language policy is tied to its nationalist policy agenda. The denial of education in Castellano (Spanish) to Spaniards—as framed by Vox—is absolutely unacceptable (Interview, Basque Country, June 2019). Vox places a strong emphasis on unity and Spanish pride through language. This is yet another talking point in the framing of a political elite class that seeks to divide the Spanish nation.

²⁰ For example, the ERC, a Catalan leftist and separatist party, was crucial in their abstention to ensure the successful investiture of the current Spanish government. In return the PSOE government agreed to not close a dialogue over the situation in Catalonia (Baquero 2020).

²¹ The “Progressive Dictatorship” term is employed by Vox elites in their discourse. Such examples can be found in the electoral debate preceding the November 10, 2019 election (debate held on November 4) as well as party social media publications.

²² As of April 2020, Vox's official Instagram account had 543K followers. PSOE, PP, and Ciudadanos all had around 100K followers, while Podemos had 243K followers. On twitter, however, Vox has 403K followers (compared to the PSOE's 774K, the PP's 776K, C's' 514K, and Podemos' impressive 1.4M followers). Vox's clear lead on Instagram could be demonstrative of its youth appeal, dominating a platform popular among younger generations.

Chapter 4

²³ Most of these features are permanent features of the Spanish system because of their legal status in the Constitution. However, as this chapter discusses, the Spanish state form of a System of Autonomies is not legally enshrined in the Constitution. The state form does, however, still belong as an institutional opportunity given its status as a defining feature of Spanish political structure.

²⁴ In the Spanish context, opportunities related to the state form refer to a debate on the preferred level of decentralization and powers granted to the autonomous communities.

²⁵ Furthermore, electoral rules have the capability of affecting the government formation process and party system characteristics (including fragmentation and polarization) (Jackman & Volpert 1996). Highly disproportional systems and majoritarian systems are likely to lead to fewer parties and single party governments, whereas proportional PR systems can facilitate coalition governments.

²⁶ One extremely relevant example of this is the Spanish General Election in April 2019 and Vox. Vox, winning 10.3 percent of the vote, earned only 24 seats in the 350 seat Cortes Generales. In a perfectly proportional electoral system, Vox would have earned 36 seats.

²⁷ For a further discussion on Podemos and Ciudadanos' emergence in the Spanish national party landscape, see Chapter 5 under the subheading: Organizational trends in the Spanish party system

²⁸ The vague compromise would lead to an easier passing of the Constitution and had the potential to leave the multiple interests partially satisfied with the deal struck. The Constitution provides another example of the steps taken in the Spanish transition to democracy that ensured peace and efficiency rather than transitional justice and permanence.

²⁹ The official workings of the Spanish state form and system of autonomies has developed throughout the country's democratic history. In 1983, after the Organic Law for the Harmonization of the Autonomic Process (1981) was passed in order to secure national legislation as the highest doctrine in Spain, many of its provisions were struck down by the Constitutional Court. The Court had demonstrated a commitment to a decentralized state (Colomer 1998). However, the issue continues to be a point of contention, with

different administrations pushing for more or less centralization of authority. Further contention is derived from the asymmetrical nature of the autonomous communities. Today, the issue of independence creates a fault line through which Spanish right-left ideology is partially split. For the most part, parties on the left favor dialogue and cooperation with separatist forces, while parties on the right are more punitive towards secessionist leaders and appear less interested in dialogue.

³⁰ Actions in Catalonia, centering on the 2017 referendum on independence and subsequent aftermath (still continuing today), have pushed more voters to view Catalonia as one of the most important issues in Spain. In Chapter 6, I focus on the issue of Catalonia as an opportunity rather than the state form of Spain as an opportunity. In Figure 6.3 (page 94), one can see a clear increase in concern over Catalonia following the 2017 referendum.

³¹ One popular narrative in Spain argues that autonomous communities were partially responsible for the country's particularly difficult experience during the financial crisis. As a result, "recentralization, or even total centralization, was not a matter of ideology and identity but a matter of 'economic rationalization' mainly understood as the need to reduce and simplify the size and extension of public administration" (Grau Creus 2018, 64).

³² The 2017 referendum in Catalonia is not the first regional push for independence in Spain. ETA (the Basque terrorist group), for example, were violent advocates of Basque independence. The Basque Country, too, has parties that advocate for independence. However, in recent years, Catalonia has presented a much more realistic possibility of succession, thus increasing the relevance the case in relation to previous separatist movements in Spain.

³³ As argued in the previous section on the "Spanish State of Autonomies as an Opportunity for Extreme Politics," this contention over the state form is largely a result of the state form itself. Its vague nature, lack of a strong senate, and regional political and economic asymmetries are an opportunity for any party arguing for extreme policies. Therefore, increasing support for centralization is not just a contextual issue (I do test for Catalonia as a contextual issue explaining Vox's success in Chapter 6), but is also a result of Spain's institutional state form.

³⁴ The relatively weaker result in Model 2 is a result of the simplified grouping of data in this test. Because I group both regional-identifying and neutral-identifying respondents into one group, more Vox-voting respondents now belong in the non-nationalist identifying group. The magnitude of the difference in Vox voting percentages is then logically smaller than that of the pure-regionalist identifiers in comparison to the pure-nationalist identifiers.

Chapter 5

³⁵ One important note here is the absence of party performance as a distinctive category in medium-term party system opportunities. I include performance, however, in two places throughout this thesis. First, in Chapter 5, performance and positioning are connected. When a party underperforms, they are failing to deliver certain ideological promises. In the case of the PP, weak performance in relation to conservative social policy indicates a position shift away from the right. Second, in Chapter 6, I discuss a corruption case known as "Gürtel" in relation to the PP. Fitting to the conceptual framework of this thesis, a corruption scandal belongs as a short-term contextual opportunity for anti-corruption frames and a party that offers an anti-political elite discourse.

³⁶ While such a shift may not move the actual right-wing populist party into the political mainstream, rightward shifts in policy can move certain policy positions into the mainstream. If a mainstream center-right party embraces the policy of an extreme-right party, that policy is more likely to be understood as

mainstream and politically acceptable. An accumulation of such policies will increasingly position the right-wing populist party as an acceptable political option.

³⁷ This includes both within the PP's elite ranks as well as in their voting base. As demonstrated by Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser (2014), voters self-identifying on the right or extreme-right overwhelmingly supported the PP in the 21st century before the 2019 General Elections. In regards to the political elites, the 1977 amnesty law ensured that Franco-era elite were able to retain positions in government and within the AP (Alianza Popular) and later the PP (Raimundo 2013; Boyd 2008).

³⁸ Vox's emergence can be seen as a splintering of the PP. Supporting this argument, for example, is the fact that many of Vox's political elite are former PP politicians, including party president Santiago Abascal.

³⁹ Hamann (2005) argues that Aznar's government provided a framework for unions to regain strength and build off of previous momentum in the 1980s. Aznar's economic policy represented continuity between PSOE and PP administrations, signaling a leftward move for the PP (Hamann 2005).

⁴⁰ The term "catch-all" here refers to a party that intentionally appeals to a broad sector of the electorate. PP policy was conservative both economically and socially. However, the party featured politicians that fit both the extreme-right and centrist molds.

⁴¹ Government formation via abstention has been the norm throughout Spain's democratic history. As demonstrated in Table 1.1 (page 13), no party has ever won an outright majority in Spanish democratic history. Therefore, leading parties have relied on abstentions (usually conditioned on certain programmatic goals or policy commitments) to form governments.

⁴² For reference, in 2017, the ideological ratings for national Spanish parties were the following: 2.38 (Podemos), 3.86 (PSOE), 6.07 (Ciudadanos), 7.14 (PP). Data is from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2017).

⁴³ The PP's support of some positive discriminatory measures leaves Vox as the only major Spanish party that refuses active measures to correct existing societal imbalances. This, for example, can be seen in Vox's stance against quotas on any socio-demographic basis in government administration or on political lists (100 Medidas, Vox 2019).

⁴⁴ The descriptive statistics for ideology are as follows: Mean: 4.7647, Standard Deviation: 1.9978, Minimum: 1, Maximum: 10, Number of Observations: 4,041.

⁴⁵ In the Spanish case, for example, Podemos' emergence into the national parliament created a more polarized legislature. Whereas party polarization had previously reflected only the division between the PSOE and the PP, the distance between Podemos on the left and the PP on the right created further separations between parties at the ends of the ideological spectrum.

⁴⁶ The system also features regional parties with considerable influence at the national level, as mentioned in Chapters 1, 3, and 4. However, of the national party competitors, the landscape transformed from a two-party to a four-party system in 2015.

⁴⁷ While multiple autonomous communities elect regional parties to the national parliament (like Navarra and the Canary Islands), the majority of seats held by regional parties represent Catalonia and the Basque Country. In fact, although winning about three more percentage points of the national vote in the

November 2019 election, Ciudadanos earned three less seats (10 compared with 13) than the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), a leftist Catalan-separatist party.

Chapter 6

⁴⁸ Also included in the literature on issues and right-wing populist parties is the EU and Euroscepticism. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, European integration is not an especially strong grievance in Spain and is not particularly central to Vox's platform.

⁴⁹ A party can also claim associative ownership because of its voting constituency (Petrocik 1996). For example, given right-wing populist framings of supporters as "pure people," such parties can gain credibility in issues that relate to national/ethnic pride and traditions (Brubaker 2017).

⁵⁰ However, unemployment has not gained recent salience and Vox does not significantly differentiate itself from other parties on the right in the economic sphere. Therefore, I do not expect a strong association between Vox's breakthrough and the economy. Furthermore, I omit European integration (which is often cited as a grievance by right-wing populists) for two reasons. First, the EU is not a strong source of contention in Spain, as discussed in Chapter 1. Second, my data source, the CIS, does not ask about European integration and does not offer it as a pressing problem facing Spain in the question used in this analysis. This absence provides further evidence that European integration is not considered a pressing problem in Spain.

⁵¹ These differences were discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to variance in the PP and Vox programs. While Vox calls for a transformation of the State of Autonomies, the PP reaffirms Spain's commitment to its autonomous community structure (100 Medidas, Vox 2019; Por todo lo que nos une, PP 2019).

⁵² The CIS "Most Important Problem" question does not feature a sharp jump in concern over corruption in recent years. However, given that this corruption case is specifically concerned with the PP, there is reason to believe that Vox had an opportunity to capitalize on voters who feel betrayed by the PP.

⁵³ The CIS "Most Important Problem" question does not give an option to list historical memory as a top issue facing Spain. However, there is ample reason to assume that Franco's exhumation made the issue more salient. The December 2019 CIS (3269) used in this study even asks a question directly about whether the exhumation influenced vote choice—demonstrating the issue's relevance in the current political climate.

⁵⁴ Political opportunities that were not quantitatively tested in this thesis include changing psychological barriers to right-wing populist success stemming from electoral systems and the organizational trends of the Spanish party system. While my data source did not ask questions directly addressing these phenomena, there is still reason to believe that these opportunities influenced Vox's breakthrough.

⁵⁵ This is demonstrated in Chapter 6's Figure 6.1 (page 91). The jump in respondent concern over immigration can be attributed in part to the government's "Aquarius" decision and the rising levels of immigration from northern Africa in recent years in Spain.

⁵⁶ This momentum relates to opportunities that Vox has seized through multiple political opportunity structures. For example, the cultural threat to Spanish unity and the grievances that it created for nationalists existed within state form, organizational party system, and issue-based frameworks. Socio-cultural momentum also includes the "progressive dictatorship" and the perceived cultural threat of Muslim immigration.