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THESIS

THE RETURN OF THE RADICAL RIGHT IN SPAIN

by

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THE RETURN OF THE RADICAL RIGHT IN SPAIN

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ABSTRACT

Despite the political pressure resulting from the surge of radical right-wing parties' electoral success in the West—from the victories of President Donald Trump in the United States and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, to Matteo Salvini in Italy—Spain was, until recently, one of the few European countries considered to be invulnerable to this far-right trend. However, after nearly four decades of exceptionalism, the Spanish exclusion ended abruptly in 2018 with the ascendance of Vox, Spain's newest radical right-wing party, into regional and national parliaments.

Taking into consideration far-right parties' commonly used ideologies of nativism and authoritarianism, this thesis analyzed the perceived contributing factors of immigration and Catalan separatism to determine if and how these two factors contributed to the rise of a Spanish radical right-wing party after the end of the Franco dictatorship.

On examination of Spanish public opinion regarding immigration and mainstream political parties, this thesis determined that the issues of immigration and the Catalan separatism contributed to the increase in negative attitude toward both. However, it was not the issues themselves that led to the rise of Vox; this thesis concludes that it was ultimately the actions and inaction of the mainstream political parties and their failure to address the increasing public concern over these two issues that provided Vox the political opportunity to enter the mainstream political arena.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	WHO IS VOX?.....	2
B.	IMPORTANCE.....	4
C.	THE RISE OF RADICAL RIGHT-WING PARTIES IN EUROPE.....	6
D.	DEMAND AND SUPPLY SIDE ARGUMENTS.....	13
1.	The Single-Issue Thesis.....	14
2.	The Political Opportunity Structure Thesis.....	15
E.	POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES	16
F.	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	17
G.	THESIS OVERVIEW AND SCOPE	18
 II.	 THE END OF SPANISH EXCEPTIONALISM.....	 19
A.	THE SECOND REPUBLIC.....	20
B.	THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR	22
C.	THE FRANCO REGIME’S REPRESSIONS.....	24
1.	Autonomous Regions	25
2.	The Media.....	26
3.	Political Parties.....	26
D.	TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY.....	27
1.	The Amnesty Law	27
2.	Democratic Elections	29
E.	CONCLUSION	31
 III.	 THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY OF IMMIGRATION.....	 33
A.	IMMIGRATION IN SPAIN	33
B.	IMMIGRATION INCREASE	35
C.	NATIONAL CONCERN OVER IMMIGRATION	38
D.	THE POLITICIZATION OF IMMIGRATION	40
E.	POLITICAL PARTIES’ POSITIONS ON IMMIGRATION.....	43
1.	Mainstream Parties on Immigration.....	44
2.	Vox on Immigration.....	45
F.	CONCLUSION	47
 IV.	 THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY OF CATALAN SEPARATISM.....	 49
A.	SPAIN’S ELECTORAL SYSTEM AS A POLITICAL TOOL	50
1.	Regional Autonomy under the 1978 Spanish Constitution.....	50

2.	Spain's Electoral System	52
B.	THE CATALAN CRISIS IN THE MAKING.....	52
C.	POPULAR PARTY'S FAILURE AGAINST CATALAN SEPARATISM	55
D.	PSOE'S CONCESSIONS TO SEPARATIST PARTIES.....	60
E.	VOX'S FIRST CATALAN POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY	61
F.	VOX'S SECOND CATALAN POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY.....	66
G.	CONCLUSION	72
V.	CONCLUSION	75
A.	IMMIGRATION REMAINS A MAIN ISSUE	75
B.	CATALAN SEPARATISM REMAINS A MAIN ISSUE	77
C.	IMPACTS OF VOX'S ASCENDANCE	79
1.	Vox's and Contemporary Spanish Politics	80
2.	Vox and EU Politics	81
	LIST OF REFERENCES	85
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	99

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Vox's Election Results (2014–2019).....	79
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Immigrant Arrivals to Spain via the Strait of Gibraltar (2008–2018)	36
Table 2.	Immigrant Arrivals to Spain via the Strait of Gibraltar (2018)	37
Table 3.	National Opinion on Immigration as a Main Issue (2018)	38
Table 4.	National Opinion on Immigration as a Main Issue (January–April 2015)	39
Table 5.	Spain General Election Results (2011–2019)	65
Table 6.	National Political Dissatisfaction (2019)	67
Table 7.	Yearly Contributions Received by Vox (2015–2018)	73
Table 8.	National Opinion on Immigration as a Main Issue (2018–2019)	76

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)
CIS	Centre for Sociological Research
CiU	Convergence and Union
EP	European Parliament
ERC	Republican Left of Catalonia
EU	European Union
PNV	Basque Nationalist Party
PP	Popular Party
PSOE	Spanish Socialist Workers Party

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I. INTRODUCTION

Radical right-wing populist parties have been gaining political traction throughout Western Europe since the 1980s.¹ More recently, Europe witnessed the rise of the radical right-wing parties, the Italian Northern League (now just the League) and the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) into national and European parliaments. The ascendance of the League and AfD coincides with the wave of radical right-wing populism that has spread throughout Europe since the outbreak of the 2015 migration crisis. Spain seemingly remained unaffected by this populist fervor since its transition to democracy in 1975.² However, this Spanish exceptionalism ended abruptly in December 2018, when Vox, a new radical right-wing party, managed to achieve electoral success in the autonomous region of Andalusia. Shortly after its regional victory, Vox gained political representation in the National Congress in the April 2019 national election and then became the third-largest national party in the subsequent November national election.³

The sudden rise of Vox took place during a time when Spain experienced a substantial increase in immigration from North Africa that overwhelmed Spanish institutions, a fact that was heavily publicized by the media. At the same time, Spain also faced the worst political crisis since its return to democracy—the Catalonia regional separatist movements, which brought violent protests to the streets of Barcelona, and became the central issue for Vox during both 2019 national elections. Was it these issues—the increase in immigration and the Catalan separatist movements—that led to the sudden rise of a radical right-wing party in Spain after so many years?

¹ Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 8.

² Sam Edwards, "The End of the Spanish Exception?," *Foreign Affairs*, June 18, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/spain/end-spanish-exception-pp>.

³ Ana Garcia Valdivia, "Far-Right Party Vox Becomes the Third Political Force In Spain After Second Election," *Forbes*, November 11, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/anagarciavaldivia/2019/11/12/far-right-vox-becomes-the-third-political-force-in-spain-after-second-election/>.

A. WHO IS VOX?

Vox's beginnings are different from other European parties of the radical right-wing family—this party was established by remnants of Spain's main conservative right-wing party, the center-right Popular Party (PP). Vox's initial motive for its establishment was to protest against the then PP leader's, Mariano Rajoy, weak stance against the Catalan separatist drive.⁴ Vox's founder and current leader, Santiago Abascal, served in the ranks of the Popular Party for more than 10 years before breaking off into his own party in 2013.⁵ Abascal defined Vox as a cultural and political movement that stands in defense of Spain against the Catalan separatist movement, which has created major political challenges since 2013.⁶

Since its inception, Vox ideologies have been on the far right of the political spectrum and fit the categorization as a radical right-wing party under the Cas Mudde's categorization of far right-wing parties.⁷ Mudde sees two subgroups among the far right: the extreme right, whose main ideologies are fascism and Nazism, and the radical right, whose major "ideological features are nativism, authoritarianism, and populism."⁸ In regard to the radical right ideologies, "nativism" is an ideology that combines nationalism and xenophobia. This ideology embraces the belief that only natives should occupy the nation and that any outside elements (people, ideas, or policies) pose a threat to the homogenous nation-state.⁹ Vox has openly promoted both—nationalism and xenophobia—during all of its campaigns, by promoting strong opposition to the Catalan

⁴ Sergio Sangiao, "Los Orígenes de Vox: el Aznarato y la Lucha Contra ETA," Contexto y Acción, November 29, 2018, <http://ctxt.es/es/20181129/Politica/23127/vox-aznar-eta-esperanza-aguirre-sergio-sangiao.htm>.

⁵ Martín Caparrós, "Vox and the Rise of the Extreme Right in Spain," *New York Times*, November 13, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/13/opinion/spain-election-vox.html>.

⁶ "100 Medidas Urgentes de VOX para España," VOX (blog), October 6, 2018, <https://voxespana.es/100-medidas-urgentes-de-vox-para-espana>.

⁷ Mudde is a well-known and frequently cited political scientist who has studied and vastly contributed to the study of political extremism and populism in Europe and the United States since the early 2000s. His categorization of the far-right is widely known and used by other political scholars when analyzing far right politics.

⁸ Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 24.

⁹ Mudde, 27.

issue and by proposing hard-liner anti-immigration laws. Vox has continued to push for the deportation of all illegal immigrants without providing avenues for asylum and to permanently suspend the autonomy status of Catalonia and ban all political parties associated with separatism.¹⁰

Within nativism, Mudde adds that Islamophobia, an irrational fear of Islam or Muslims, has become the main form of prejudice attack in recent years. Vox is a strong opponent to immigration from Muslim countries and has proposed to block them completely to allow immigrants from more similar cultures (Latin Americans) to enter Spain.¹¹ In reference to the authoritarian ideology, Mudde uses the term to refer to the party's desire to maintain a "strictly ordered society" where violators are to be severely punished.¹² Vox was a strong proponent of the use of the Guardia Civil to restore order during the 2019 Catalan protests. Vox even petitioned to invoke Article 116 of the constitution, which would allow the government to impose martial law in the region of Catalonia to restore order.¹³

Mudde maintains that the main difference between the extreme and radical right-wing subgroups is that "the extreme right rejects the essence of democracy—the idea of political equality and government by popular majority," while the radical right "supports democracy, at least in theory, but fundamentally challenges key institutions and values of liberal democracy, including minority rights, rule of law and separation of powers."¹⁴ Vox has, to this point, supported democracy by participating in the voting process, but strongly

¹⁰ Carolina Martínez, "Así es el Programa Electoral de Vox para las Elecciones Andaluzas y para toda España," *El Confidencial*, December 3, 2018, https://www.elconfidencial.com/elecciones-andalucia/2018-12-02/programa-electoral-de-vox_1681770/.

¹¹ Leonor Mayor, "VOX Prefiere los Inmigrantes Procedentes de América Latina," March 29, 2019, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20190329/461317050343/vox-santiago-abascal-inmigracion.html>.

¹² Mudde, 29.

¹³ "Vox Pide al Congreso Aplicar de Forma 'Inmediata' el Estado de Excepción," *El Independiente*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.elindependiente.com/politica/2019/10/16/vox-pide-al-congreso-la-aplicacion-inmediata-del-estado-de-excepcion-en-cataluna/>.

¹⁴ Mudde, 30.

opposes the autonomous regions, and proposes to abolish all autonomous regional powers to create one parliament for all of Spain, signaling authoritarian tendencies.¹⁵

Unlike other parties that experienced success by using one specific issue as a central topic, Vox is not considered a single-issue party,¹⁶ as it promotes policy positions that oppose “same-sex marriage, abortion, gender quotas, gender violence protection ordinances, and general social welfare provision,” which closely align this party to other radical right-wing forces in Europe.¹⁷ Following the lead of other radical right-wing parties, such as the French Front National (FN), German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), Britain’s UKIP and the Italian League, Vox also made anti-immigration central to its platform during the 2018 Andalusian election campaign, in which the leaders of the party referred to immigrants as invaders, promoted the immediate deportation of all undocumented immigrants and proposed to end all government social welfare programs that support immigrants.¹⁸

B. IMPORTANCE

This research is important because it contributes to the extensive debate concerning the factors that increase the support of radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. Any number of studies have focused on other Western European countries, yet Spain has been conspicuously absent in the scholarly debate due to the lack of success of far right-wing parties. This research expands the analysis of the ongoing academic subject of radical right-wing populism and its ascendance into a country that, until recently, formed the exception to this political movement.

¹⁵ “Vox, Programa Electoral: «Suprimir el Estado de las Autonomías» y «Recuperar Gibraltar», ABC, November 9, 2019, https://www.abc.es/elecciones/elecciones-generales/abci-programa-electoral-suprimir-estado-autonomias-y-recuperar-gibraltar-201911090944_noticia.html.

¹⁶ Gissur Erlingsson, Kare Vemby, and Richard Ohrvall, “The Single-Issue Party Thesis and the Sweden Democrats,” *Acta Politica* 49, no. 2 (2014): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2013.18>.

¹⁷ Stuart J. Turnbull-Dugarte, “Explaining the End of Spanish Exceptionalism and Electoral Support for Vox,” *Research & Politics* 6, no. 2 (April 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168019851680>.

¹⁸ Alvarado Carvajal, “El Mensaje de Vox Sobre Inmigración que Conquista Almería: ‘Son Una Invasión que Viene a Sustituirnos,’” *Elmundo*, November 24, 2018, <https://www.elmundo.es/andalucia/2018/11/24/5bf86e92468aeb03248b4695.html>.

This topic is significant to U.S. national security interests because politics in Spain could affect both, future domestic and international policies, as well as the cohesion of the European Union. Determining the factors that lead to the breakthrough of Vox in Spain may confirm scholarly theories and provide information to predict future electoral fortunes of the far-right in other Western European countries. Additionally, the confirmation of factors that contribute to right-wing parties' support would allow institutions, such as the European Union, to intervene in an attempt to alleviate the issues that lead to the increase of electoral support of these parties. According to Betz, radical right-wing populist parties present political and cultural threats to Western societies because their radical right-wing policies and ideas could "lead to erosion of openness, solidarity and historical sensitivity while encouraging prejudice, intolerance, self-righteousness and blatant egoism."¹⁹

The cohesion of the European Union could face major challenges if a coalition of radical right-wing parties achieves a majority vote in the European Parliament. Matteo Salvini, Italy's former deputy prime minister and leader of the radical right-wing nationalist League party, attempted to form an alliance within the EU to campaign for the May 2019 European Parliament (EP) election. Salvini's goal was to increase the coalition's share of seats in the EP to influence and shape policies and reforms in the EU.²⁰ If a far right-wing alliance manages to win more than 33 percent of EP seats, it could go on to compromise the EU's current foreign policy on Russia, disrupt external trade policies, and adopt new legislation that would, as the primary solution to immigration, restrict EU's freedom of movement, which could potentially have a negative impact to the Schengen zone.²¹ All possible outcomes that would create challenges for the United States' foreign European policies.

¹⁹ Hans-Georg Betz, "The Growing Threat of the Radical Right," in *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Peter Merkl and Weinberg Leonard (London: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 89, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203497913>.

²⁰ Rachel Donadio, "A New European Political Bloc Wants to Dismantle Europe," *The Atlantic*, April 8, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/04/far-right-euroskeptic-alliance-wants-dismantle-europe/586702/>.

²¹ Susi Dennison and Paweł Zerka, "The 2019 European Election: How Anti-Europeans Plan to Wreck Europe and What Can Be Done to Stop It," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2, accessed May 21, 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/the_2019_european_election.

C. THE RISE OF RADICAL RIGHT-WING PARTIES IN EUROPE

What are the factors that lead to the electoral fortune of radical right-wing populist parties? What generates an increase in voting for these political parties? This literature review examines the different factors regarding the electoral success of radical right-wing populist parties in Europe. Although the research on this topic is abundant, Spain received little attention in this matter because right-wing parties were considered non-existent or unimportant from an electoral and political perspective. Analyst Gonzalez-Enriquez, in 2017, asserted that Spain was the exception to right-wing politics in Europe because it experienced high levels of immigration, an economic crisis, and public political dissatisfaction, yet radical right-wing parties failed to gain support.²²

Since the 2015 European migration crisis, anti-immigration radical right-wing parties in Europe have experienced an increase of electoral success by using nationalistic and xenophobic discourses. The rational and widespread assumption is that the success of anti-immigration radical right-wing parties is directly linked to the increase of immigration and the concern it creates on voters. Germany, for example, witnessed the rise of the radical right-wing party Alternative for Germany (AfD)—a party that heavily campaigned against immigration and the fear of Islamization of Germany and attained 13.3 percent of the votes in the 2017 national election.²³ In 2018, Italy also observed the sudden and rapid rise of the radical right-wing party, Lega, led by Matteo Salvini, a hard-liner anti-immigration populist who used anti-immigration rhetoric to increase support for the party from 4 percent to 18 percent of the votes in the national election.²⁴ The electoral success of the AfD and Lega occurred when their countries were experiencing high levels of immigration, and their parties were using the matter of immigration as their most important issue, while mainstream parties were not addressing voters' ~~concerns over the immigration matter.~~

²² Carmen González-Enríquez, "The Spanish Exception: Unemployment, Inequality and Immigration, but No Right-Wing Populist Parties" (working paper, Royal Ienstitute, 2014).

²³ Jenny Hill, "Why So Many Voters in Germany's East Chose AfD," BBC News, September 26, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41398628>.

²⁴ Alexander Stille, "How Matteo Salvini Pulled Italy to the Far Right," *Guardian*, August 9, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-righ>

Gonzalez-Enriquez also claims that between the years 2000–2009, Spain received more migrants than any other EU state. She also adds that the 2008 financial crisis affected Spain first when the construction businesses collapsed, which consequently raised unemployment from 8 percent in 2008 to 26 percent in 2013. Furthermore, the economic crisis and the discovery of corruption within the government created distrust and dissatisfaction with the standing political parties.²⁵ Although right-wing parties have historically capitalized on these types of challenges to gain support, Spain remained unaffected until the emergence of Vox in 2018.

Such other authors as Jan-Werner Müller claim that radical right-wing parties successfully play to nativist anxieties over increasing immigration, particularly through periods of financial adversity, as one of their most dependable tactics to gain electoral support.²⁶ However, his claim seemed not to apply in Spain, at least until recently. Gonzalez-Enriquez asserts that the combination of favorable attitudes towards migrants and a lack of a strong, collective national identity prevented populist parties from gaining support.²⁷ Others suggest that Spain's recent memory of the Franco regime also contributed to preventing right-wing parties from gaining electoral support. In this view, the Spanish public associates nationalistic rhetoric with the discredited fascist past, which accounts for the lack of nationalistic pride; instead, citizens identify with their autonomous regions more than the entire nation.²⁸

Radical right-wing populist parties in Europe are not a new phenomenon. Western European democratic states have been under heavy strain from right-wing parties since the late 1980s. It was during this period that right-wing parties shifted their approach to politics in order to distance themselves from the fascist and Nazi appearance to better appeal voters. The French radical right-wing party, The Front National, was established in 1972 but failed

²⁵ González-Enríquez, 10.

²⁶ Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 12–13.

²⁷ González-Enríquez, 10.

²⁸ Sabrine Djemil, “Against All Odds: The Spanish Exception to Right-Wing Populism,” *Democratic Erosion* (blog), February 14, 2018, <http://democratic-erosion.com/2018/02/14/against-all-odds-the-spanish-exception-to-right-wing-populism-by-sabrine-djemil-columbia-university/>.

to gain electoral support due to its rooted neo-fascist ideas of the 1950s.²⁹ It was not until the 1980s, under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen and his liberal ideological and organizational elements of the right-wing that managed to get the party electoral support.³⁰

Even during their early ascendance, radical right-wing parties have been perceived as “posing the most significant challenge to the established structure and politics of Western democracy.”³¹ The research on radical right-wing populism is substantial, and even though this subject has been broadly covered, experienced analysts continue to disagree on what to call these parties. Betz says the radical right-wing populist parties are

right-wing first in their rejection of individual and social equality and of political projects that seek to achieve it; second in their opposition to the social integration of marginalized groups; and third in their appeal to xenophobia, if not overt racism and anti-Semitism.³²

Other scholars refer to these parties as the extreme right and base their label on ideological characteristics. These characteristics include xenophobia, ethnonationalism, sociocultural authoritarianism, and anti-system populism.³³ Betz adds such ideologies as nativism, which includes nationalism and xenophobia.³⁴ Regardless of what label is given to radical right-wing parties by scholars, the common characteristics of nationalism and xenophobia are tools these parties use to appeal to voters.

Some scholars assert that far right-wing populist parties in the West bring in different political agendas, not just nationalism and xenophobia, to attract voters.³⁵ Indeed, many scholars agree, that radical right-wing parties use contemporary issues to attract

²⁹ Betz, 13.

³⁰ Betz, 15.

³¹ Betz, 3.

³² Betz, 4.

³³ Manuela Caiani, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right: Germany, Italy, and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

³⁴ Betz, 14.

³⁵ Paul Hainsworth, *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (London: Pinter, 2000).

attention from disenchanted voters.³⁶ Wodak asserts that “all right-wing populist parties instrumentalize some ethnic, religious, linguistic, political minority as a scapegoat for most if not all current woes and subsequently construe the respective group as dangerous and a threat ‘to us’ to ‘our’ nation to create fear in the population.”³⁷

According to Wodak, far right-wing parties have attempted to distance themselves from the traditional neo-Nazi rhetoric and the extreme far-right perception by adopting a softer right-wing populist approach. This approach could be considered “the Haiderization of politics,”³⁸ a nod to the photogenic earlier leader of the right-wing Austrian Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreich or FPÖ), Jörg Haider. Wodak claims that “Haider’s performance, style, rhetoric, and ideologies” standardized for the rest of Europe the use of “xenophobic, racist and anti-Semitic, exclusionary and anti-elitist politics” since the late 1980s.³⁹ Jörg Haider is considered by many to have contributed to the resurgence of radical right-wing populism because, unlike the right-wing parties of the 1960s and 1970s that campaigned on Nazi and backward-looking nationalistic ideologies, Haider offered a more modern, democratic image that resonated with voters.⁴⁰ Haider, using his charismatic, controversial and clever demagogue normalized campaigning on formerly unaccepted xenophobic, anti-immigration and Islamophobic rhetoric in the circles of politics. Following Haider’s lead, new radical right-wing populist parties from Belgium, France, Italy, and Germany achieved substantial advances into mainstream politics.⁴¹

By the 1990s, the success of such other right-wing parties as the Front National Party in France, also demonstrated that there was a potential electoral appeal with the issue

³⁶ Jens Rydgren, “Explaining the Emergence of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties: The Case of Denmark,” *West European Politics* 27, no. 3 (2004): 474–502, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0140238042000228103>.

³⁷ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015), 2.

³⁸ Wodak, 2.

³⁹ Wodak, 2.

⁴⁰ Paul Hockenos, “Jörg Haider: Austria’s Far Right Wunderkind,” *World Policy Journal* 12, no. 3 (1995): 75.

⁴¹ Hockenos, 75.

of immigration and that the population's growing anxieties over immigration could be used as a tool to gain political support.⁴² In 1993, The French National received 12.5 percent of the vote in a national election by running a campaign on immigration and law and order.⁴³ In 1999, Haider's new right-wing tactics propelled the FPÖ into National Parliament after securing 27.2 percent of votes, running a campaign on racist slogans against immigrants.⁴⁴ After Haider's ascension into parliament, the European Union accused the Austrian government of being anti-democratic for allowing a right-wing party into government and imposed sanctions against the Austrian new elected government. Wodak asserts that an EU formal investigation concluded that Austria was still abiding by all EU treaties and consequently lifted all sanctions previously imposed, further legitimizing the new radical rhetoric. According to Wodak, the EU's attempt to prevent far right-wing ideologies from entering parliament failed and further normalized the acceptance of other European radical right-wing populist parties to enter into national governments.⁴⁵

Other scholars have pointed out that right-wing parties have many different features that they employ to gain popularity and that there are a few specific elements that emerge as more central than others. The most common elements are "nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democracy, and support for a strong state."⁴⁶ The element that the party chooses to use depends on the situation of the country or region that far right-wing parties aim to influence. For example, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) focused its campaign on EU-sceptic and European identity issues in the 2014 European Parliament elections, which led the party to win first place with 25 percent of the votes.⁴⁷ However, the party focused on the immigration issue during national elections to stay relevant and attract voters.⁴⁸ Italy's Lega Nord party initially campaigned for autonomy in the northern regions

⁴² Betz, 119.

⁴³ Betz, 64.

⁴⁴ Wodak, 177.

⁴⁵ Wodak, 178.

⁴⁶ Hainsworth, 9.

⁴⁷ Wodak, 43.

⁴⁸ Betz, 247–50.

of Italy and received 20 percent of the votes in the 1990s. However, the Lega Nord, in order to become a national party adopted a strong opposition to immigration, Islam and the European Union and consequently increased its national share of votes from 4 percent in 2013 to 13 percent in 2015.⁴⁹

Considering immigration as a factor for right-wing parties' success, Swank and Betz found that the volume of refugees and asylum seekers arriving into a country have a direct correlation to the number of votes received by right-wing parties.⁵⁰ However, other scholars claim that it is not the volume of immigrants that attract voters, but instead, it is the way that right-wing parties politicize the issue.⁵¹ Rydgren argues that during the 1970s, Denmark experienced high levels of immigration and xenophobic attitudes, but the immigration challenge did not become politicized to gain votes.⁵² However, in the 1980s, the Progress Party employed tactics similar to that of the French Front National Party in which the anti-immigrant rhetoric attracted attention from the media and ultimately resulted in a higher level of votes.⁵³

In order to gain popularity, some radical right-wing parties politicize—even weaponize—their anti-immigration agenda. In the Danish case, the far right-wing populist parties portrayed immigrants as threats to their culture and ethnonational identity. The Danish People's party claimed that the excess influx of immigrants and their hesitation to integrate would pose a threat to the Danish people and culture once immigrants become a large part of the population.⁵⁴ The concern of migrants' influx and the high birth-rates of immigrants (and the low birth-rates of the natives) became a crucial point in the Danish

⁴⁹ Jean-Yves Camus, *Far-Right Politics in Europe* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 184.

⁵⁰ D. Swank and Betz Hans-Georg, "Globalization, the Welfare State and Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe," *Socio-Economic Review* 1, no. 2 (May 1, 2003): 215–45, <https://doi.org/10.1093/soceco/1.2.215>.

⁵¹ Rydgren, 492.

⁵² Rydgren, 492.

⁵³ Rydgren, 493.

⁵⁴ Rydgren, 482.

People party's discourse.⁵⁵ Betz and Rydgren agree that right-wing parties use the issue of immigration in multiple facets to gain attention. Radical right-wing parties usually blame immigrants for the increase of crime, the rise of unemployment, the increasing cost of welfare to the state, and as a threat to national and cultural identity.⁵⁶

Such scholars as Jason M. Smith claim that levels of crime also have a positive influence on the success of right-wing parties.⁵⁷ Smith's research shows that the emergence of new right-wing parties and the increase of crime in some Western European countries have a direct correlation.⁵⁸ He further asserts that right-wing populist parties appeal to voters "concerned with their physical, economic, and social security" by promising stronger law and order reforms.⁵⁹ His analysis concluded that immigration and a high level of crime independently affect right-wing parties' support. However, he also claims that the combination of these two factors sharply increases the support for right-wing parties.⁶⁰

The issue of unemployment is also viewed as bolstering support for right-wing parties.⁶¹ Worsening economic conditions are expected to increase the support for right-wing parties because it provides far right-wing political leaders the opportunity to blame immigration for economic decline.⁶² According to Jackman and Volpert, immigrants and jobs are easily linked to one another by right-wing parties. The French National Front created the slogan "two million immigrants are the cause of two million French people out

⁵⁵ Rydgren, 484.

⁵⁶ Betz, 119.

⁵⁷ Jason Matthew Smith, "Does Crime Pay? Issue Ownership, Political Opportunity, and the Populist Right in Western Europe," *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 11 (November 2010): 1472, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414010372593>.

⁵⁸ Smith, 1484

⁵⁹ Smith, 1478.

⁶⁰ Smith, 1489.

⁶¹ Robert W. Jackman and Karin Volpert, "Conditions Favouring Parties of the Extreme Right in Western Europe," *British Journal of Political Science* 26 (1996): 508.

⁶² Jackman and Volpert, 516.

of work” to appeal to voters’ concerns of unemployment.⁶³ Jackman and Volpert’s study on unemployment and far right-wing parties concluded that higher rates of unemployment are derivative of a slow economic performance that provide fertile ground to far right-wing parties to exploit their xenophobic political agenda.⁶⁴

In conclusion, it is evident that far right-wing parties use different strategies and factors to gain electoral fortune. After reviewing the literature on this subject, it also becomes apparent that different countries have supported radical right-wing parties for different reasons. However, issues surrounding immigration, law and order, unemployment and welfare, remain the most common appeals to disenchanting voters.

D. DEMAND AND SUPPLY SIDE ARGUMENTS

Roger Eatwell provides demand and supply-side arguments to help understand the emergence of radical right-wing parties. The demand side argument refers to the “arguments that focus primarily on socio-economic developments, such as the impact of immigration, unemployment, or rapid social change.”⁶⁵ The demand side arguments create or raise voters’ concerns over issues, in this case, immigration, that in turn demand mainstream political parties’ attention to address those anxieties. The supply-side argument refers to the “messages that reach voters” from the insurgent and mainstream parties that address voters’ increasing concerns, such as the increase of immigration.⁶⁶ In other words, the supply-side arguments provide political parties the ability to address voters’ main issues or concerns. The failure of mainstream parties to address voters’ concerns over specific issues creates the political opportunity for insurgent parties to address those concerns and in turn gain popularity and electoral support.

⁶³ Jackman and Volpert, 5 .

⁶⁴ Jackman and Volpert, 517.

⁶⁵ Robert Eatwell, “Ten Theories on the Extreme Right,” in *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Peter Merkl and Weinberg Leonard (London: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 48, <https://doi.org/10.4324/978020349791348>.

⁶⁶ Eatwell, 48.

Using Eatwell's interpretation of the single-issue and Political Opportunity Structure theses (explained in section two below), this chapter investigates the hypothesis that the surge of uncontrolled immigration into Spain's Southern region of Andalusia increased voters' concern over immigration and in turn, voters supported the party that addressed the issue. Moreover, the hypothesis assumed that the inability or unwillingness of traditional mainstream parties to address the voters' concerns over immigration created the political opportunity for Vox to take center stage to disseminate its anti-immigration policy proposals that mobilized voters in their support.

1. The Single-Issue Thesis

The single-issue thesis from the demand side arguments places significant importance on the anti-immigration issue, which can encompass other concerns, such as "law and order, unemployment, or welfare."⁶⁷ According to Eatwell, the French radical right-wing party Front National (FN) received considerable support in the 1995 presidential election after adopting an anti-immigration program, in which 22 percent of its electorate considered immigration as a leading political priority. The single-issue thesis suggests that radical right-wing parties will gain voters' support when there are significant concerns about an issue that remains unaddressed, providing a political opportunity to address them. Eatwell also highlights the Austrian party FPÖ, which exploited the immigration issue and experienced a significant increase of electoral support in the 1990s, a time when immigration increased to over 9 percent of Austria's population.

Eatwell points out that the single-issue thesis works for investigating a single issue, but research has proven that parties usually have more than one program, which covers more than the immigration-related matters. According to Eatwell, although anti-immigration and its xenophobia message were undeniably important to FN voters in the 1990s, some of its voters were also attracted to its "authoritarian-conservative ideology."⁶⁸ Jason M. Smith asserts that although immigration is seen as the essential issue utilized by

⁶⁷ Eatwell, 49.

⁶⁸ Eatwell, 50.

radical right-wing parties to garner electoral support, other issues such as “security/crime, social welfare, and anti-party/politics sentiments” also boost support for these parties.⁶⁹ For this investigation, the single-issue of immigration will be examined with the acknowledgment that Vox potentially used other than the immigration issue to garner voters’ support. This thesis also explores voters’ concern over the Catalan separatist issue and mainstream parties’ failure to address voters’ concerns as another potential factor for the ascendance of Vox.

2. The Political Opportunity Structure Thesis

The Political Opportunity Structure thesis (POS) from the supply side seeks to explain the rise of radical right-wing parties via two properties of the political context. First, it emphasizes the political programs of mainstream parties or their position over specific issues, and whether those programs assist or impede the insurgent party. Secondly, it highlights the institutional setting and the political space available for an insurgent party to enter into the mainstream political domain.⁷⁰ This research focuses on the immigration political programs and position of the mainstream parties, as well as the effect that these had on the electoral success of Vox. Eatwell contends that the POS method holds that radical right-wing parties are likely to gain electoral support when mainstream parties fail to address issues that become important to voters. Eatwell further cites the electoral success of the French Front National party, which increasingly used anti-immigrant rhetoric in the early 1980s, a time when mainstream political parties were ignoring the citizens’ concerns and were even promising more benefits to immigrants. Smith also contends that radical right-wing parties gain electoral support when voters perceive the traditional mainstream parties’ inability to solve social issues.⁷¹ A recent study on the AfD concluded that this

⁶⁹ Smith, 1475.

⁷⁰ Eatwell, 58.

⁷¹ Smith, 1478.

party received support because “other parties failed to meet their preferences on their most prioritized issue—immigration.”⁷²

E. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Vox resembles other European radical right-wing parties that have used nationalism and xenophobic discourses to reach electoral fortune. The surge of electoral support for Vox coincides with two major issues that may have supported Vox’s use of nationalism and xenophobic discourses in Spain: Immigration and the Catalan separatist movements.

One hypothesis is that, although Spain’s past immigration surges did not lead to the rise of radical right-wing populist parties in the past, it is possible that the increase of immigrants arriving via the Mediterranean in 2018, a surge that consequently overwhelmed the region of Andalusia’s agencies and resources, provided Vox the opportunity to assume center stage on the immigration issue, thus bolstering support for the party. According to the International Organization for Migration (OIM), Spain received, through the Strait of Gibraltar, 8,613 immigrants in 2016, 22,414 in 2017, and a record-setting number of 58,525 in 2018.⁷³

The gradual increase of migrants into Spain is claimed to have been caused by the Closure of the Eastern Mediterranean route by the 2016 EU-Turkey deal;⁷⁴ and the closure of the Central Mediterranean route by the Italian radical right-wing leader, Matteo Salvini.⁷⁵ The increase of migrants arriving daily to Spain placed an unmanageable strain on shelters located in the southern coastal municipalities of Andalusia and Algeciras. With an average of 160 migrants arriving daily in 2018, shelters often had difficulty managing

⁷² Winston Chou et al., “The Illusion of Radical Right Partisan Stability: How Party Positioning Affects Radical Right Voting in Germany,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, December 4, 2018), 3, <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3411075>.

⁷³ “Europe,” Flow Monitoring, accessed May 17, 2019, <https://migration.iom.int/europe?type=arrivals>.

⁷⁴ Mariana Karakoulaki, “EU-Turkey Deal Two Years after: The Burden on Refugees in Greece,” Open Migration, April 11, 2018, <https://openmigration.org/en/analyses/eu-turkey-deal-the-burden-on-refugees-in-greece/>.

⁷⁵ Nick Squires, “Italy Intensifies Campaign against Migrants by Refusing Access to Merchant Vessel Involved in Rescue,” *Telegraph*, July 10, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/07/10/italy-intensifies-campaign-against-migrants-refusing-access/>.

the considerable influx and were unable to provide proper care to all migrants, leaving some without a proper place to sleep.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, most of the arrivals took place in the southern region of Andalusia, where Vox achieved its first electoral success after strongly campaigning against immigration.

The second hypothesis considers the ongoing Catalan separatist movements, which have created the worse political crisis in Spain since its return to democracy.⁷⁷ Catalan separatist parties have, since 1993, been pushing for greater autonomy and in 2017 voted on a referendum to completely secede from Spain. The central government under both, the Popular Party (PP) and Socialist Party (PSOE) have failed to suppress the Catalan separatist movements that have, since 2017, turned violent and brought instability to the region. Vox has been promoting opposition to the Catalan separatist drive since the party was established in 2013 and has recently gained popularity with its nationalistic and defender of Spain's unity discourse. The hypothesis is that the failures of the mainstream parties to control the Catalan separatism provided Vox the political opportunity that allowed Vox to assume center stage as the best-suited party to protect Spain's sovereignty.

F. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis uses survey data from Spain's Centre for Sociological Research (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas—CIS) to examine what the Spanish population considers to be Spain's most important issues. To investigate the two hypotheses, this thesis specifically examines the Spanish public opinion concerning immigration and mainstream political parties/politicians. To investigate the immigration hypothesis, the research examines the number of immigrants arriving in Andalusia and the challenges created by their arrival in the region. To analyze the impacts of immigration, the research refers to news articles, current events, and journal articles covering the topic of immigration. Then a regression statistical analysis is conducted between the increase of citizens' concern over

⁷⁶ Jesús A. Cañas and Eva Sáiz, "Migrant Arrivals Push Shelters to Breaking Point in Southern Spain," *El País*, July 26, 2018, https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/07/26/inenglish/1532595385_902317.html.

⁷⁷ "Catalan Crisis in 300 Words," BBC News, October 14, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41584864>.

immigration and the number of immigrant arrivals to determine if the surge of immigration and its related challenges, raises citizens' concerns over immigration.

To investigate the Catalan separatist movement hypothesis, this thesis also examines CIS surveys to determine if there has been a change in the public opinion concerning mainstream political parties and its leaders. Mainstream parties have failed to quell the Catalan separatist drive, including the chaos that the Catalan protests have created in the Catalan region. Not to mention the political deadlock brought by mainstream parties' inability to form a government, which led the voters to vote in four general elections in four years. The research will also refer to news articles, current events, and journal articles covering the Catalan separatist crisis to analyze the actions or inactions of the mainstream parties regarding the Catalan issue.

G. THESIS OVERVIEW AND SCOPE

This thesis is organized into five chapters and conducts research and analysis on two possible factors that provided Vox its recent electoral success. The first substantive chapter considers Spain's history under a fascist dictatorship as a possible reason for the Spanish immunity to far right-wing parties for nearly four decades. Chapter III explores one of the far-right most commonly used issues to gain electoral success: Immigration. Chapter IV considers the Catalan separatist movements as another factor that led to the rise of Vox in such a short period of time. The last chapter concludes the research and provides an analysis of the findings of the immigration and Catalonia separatism factors for Vox's rapid ascendance. Furthermore, this chapter considers the potential outcome for Vox if another national election is held in the near future. It also examines Vox's current influence on Spanish politics as well as the possible effects this party could have on Spain's relationship with the European Union.

II. THE END OF SPANISH EXCEPTIONALISM

Since the 1980s, radical right-wing populist parties have enjoyed significant regional and national electoral success across Europe using xenophobic and nationalistic discourses. Spain, however, had been an exception to this rightward shift.⁷⁸ The usual explanation for this exception has been attributed to the memory of the Franco regime and the oppression experienced under his dictatorship. After almost four decades under the fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco, Spain transitioned to democracy in 1975, and it had until recently, managed to remain free of radical right-wing political parties. However, in December 2018, the radical right-wing party Vox managed to gain electoral success in the autonomous region of Andalusia, effectively ending the Spanish exceptionalism. Vox continued its electoral momentum by winning 24 seats in the National Congress of deputies in April 2019, three seats in the European Parliament in May and 52 seats in the subsequent November National election.⁷⁹ Social issues related to immigration and the Catalan Crisis have been posited as possible reasons for the rise of radical right-wing in Spain.

Before exploring possible reasons for Spain's end of exceptionalism to radical right-wing parties, this chapter seeks first to understand its history under the rule of fascism and the effect that it had on the consciousness of the Spanish people. Since the establishment of the Second Republic in 1931, Spain experienced a high level of political violence that continued through a three-year Civil War (1936–1939) and a 36-year fascist dictatorship (1939–1975) under the rule of Francisco Franco. The fascist regime further oppressed social freedoms and carried out thousands of political murders for over three decades in order to retain power. It is the memory of the political violence and social repressions experienced during the civil war and the Franco regime that set a precedent for the exclusion of radical right-wing parties in Spain after its transition to democracy in 1975. Moreover, the transition to democracy after the death of Franco helped to shape the socio-

⁷⁸ González-Enríquez.

⁷⁹ Pablo Ortiz Barquero, "The Electoral Breakthrough of the Radical Right in Spain: Correlates of Electoral Support for VOX in Andalusia (2018)," *Genealogy* 3, no. 4 (December 2019): 72, <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3040072>.

political environment in a manner whereby nationalism and radical right-wing parties' discourses were considered unacceptable by the majority of Spaniards.

This chapter provides an overview of the political violence and repression experienced in Spain from the establishment of the Second Republic, through the civil war and during the Franco Regime to support the argument that the memories of this period played a role in maintaining the lack of visible support for radical right-wing political parties in the immediate post-Franco decades. Additionally, this chapter examines the transition to democracy after the death of Franco and the agreements reached by both sides of the political spectrum that shaped the socio-political environment to exclude radical right-wing parties.

A. THE SECOND REPUBLIC

The creation of a new republic in 1931 brought with it a new wave of modern political violence that created a significant division between both sides of the political sphere and claimed as many as 2,000 lives before finally erupting into a full civil war.⁸⁰ The abrupt end of the Bourbon monarchy led to the establishment of a democratic government in Spain—the Second Republic.⁸¹ A new constitution was implemented in December of 1931 by the provisional government led by the Republicans on the Left, but strong opposition from the Nationalists on the Right created deep antagonism between both sides of the political arena.

The Republicans on the Left wanted to move toward a more progressive and liberal state, while the conservatives on the Right supported the Church and the Monarchy, in other words, authoritarianism. According to Casanova, the Republicans spent the first two years reforming the structure of the Army; establishing the separation of the Church and State; and implementing legislation on land distribution, workers' compensation and public

⁸⁰ Stanley G. Payne, "Political Violence During the Spanish Second Republic," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2 (April 1, 1990): 269, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200949002500206>.

⁸¹ Ergasto Ramón Arango, *The Spanish Political System: Franco's Legacy*, Westview Special Studies in West European Politics and Society (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978), 60.

education.⁸² However, although Spain was heading along a progressive path, Casanova asserts that these new laws created high tensions among different cultures within Spain, between Catholics and anticlericalists, employers and employees, and between the Church and State, that led to high levels of violence.⁸³

The Republican legislation produced a series of violent union strikes and disruptions around the country—and one attempted military coup staged by the Right. According to Casanova, the military was used to enforce Martial Law in major cities while the Civil Guard employed lethal force against protesters, resulting in the killing of aggrieved peasants. Payne asserts that more than 200 workers died in protests and confrontations during the first two years of the Republic.⁸⁴ The only violence in the first two years of the republic from the Right was the attempted military coup led by General Jose Sanjurjo in August 1932, an intervention that was quickly suppressed by the government and resulted in only two deaths.⁸⁵

The political violence increased after the Republicans lost the 1933 elections and refused to accept the radical Right's control of the government. On 5 October 1934, a series of strikes took place around Spain. In the province of Asturias, protesters committed atrocities, including the murder of priests.⁸⁶ The government was forced to send military forces led by General Francisco Franco to suppress the uprising, specifically in Asturias, where most of the violence took place.⁸⁷ Payne asserts that at least 20,000 leftists were arrested, and 1,500 lost their lives in the aftermath of the insurrection.⁸⁸

⁸² Julian Casanova, *The Spanish Republic and Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 37.

⁸³ Casanova, 38.

⁸⁴ Payne, 274.

⁸⁵ Payne, 274.

⁸⁶ Payne, 278.

⁸⁷ Paul Preston, "Spain's October Revolution and the Rightist Grasp for Power," *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, no. 4 (1975): 572, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/260101>.

⁸⁸ Payne, 279.

Political violence reached its peak after the Left coalition Popular Front won the February 1936 general elections. After the announcement of the election results, a series of political murders took place from both sides, but the Right escalated the violence even further by attempting to assassinate the Socialists' leader in March of the same year.⁸⁹ Payne asserts that although the Republic had already experienced hundreds of political murders, none of thus far had targeted such a prominent political figure. After the attempt on the Socialist leader, the streets of Spain became nearly a war zone as murders and assassinations became a daily occurrence.⁹⁰ The Right's high-ranking military officers, Franco included, feared a leftist revolution and began to plot a coup against the new regime. Arango asserts that the event which activated the Right rebels took place the night of 12 July 1936, when Calvo Sotelo, a leader of the political Right, was taken from his home and killed in cold blood by the Republican police force. The military uprising that became a civil war began on 17 July 1936, and its violence consumed Spain until 1 April 1939.

B. THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The Spanish civil war (1936–1939) was a violent political conflict between the Republicans on the Left and the Nationalists on the Right. The Spanish civil war is remembered for the horrific acts of violence it caused and the way in which Spaniards dehumanized each other during the conflict. Mass killings were used by both sides in attempts to exterminate their respective enemies.⁹¹ The political killings intensified immediately after the war started and continued throughout Franco's dictatorship. It is estimated that 120,000 executions were carried out on both sides during the war.⁹²

The Republicans and the Nationalists attempted to create efficient and subtle methods to carry out executions. On the one hand, the Republican side formed death squads

⁸⁹ Payne, 280.

⁹⁰ Arango, 76.

⁹¹ Casanova, 5.

⁹² Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War*, Cambridge Essential Histories (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 104.

called “Checas” and set up facilities to carry out their activities.⁹³ According to Payne, official Republican police and security forces participated in the death squads’ actions.⁹⁴ Additionally, the Republicans established a new revolutionary court system that imposed death sentences to nationalist supporters found guilty of supporting the military insurgency. Payne asserts that the new Republican court system accounted for 2,500 executions in the month of November 1936 alone. However, on the other hand, the Nationalists from the beginning, relied on the military, using soldiers and the Civil Guard to carry out its repressions and executions. Payne asserts that in February 1937, Franco ordered the execution of 2,000 Republicans after the seizure of a small town.⁹⁵ Subsequently, Franco adopted a system of military tribunals to formalize and institutionalize the repressions.

Political executions continued to take place without the involvement of the new tribunal systems both parties had adopted. In Madrid, the Republicans had 2,500 political prisoners awaiting trial. However, the Republican leaders decided the prisoners were potential risks and ordered their execution and their bodies dumped outside the city.⁹⁶ The Nationalists committed a similar act in the town of Zaragoza. They had taken control of the citizens but decided to execute 6,000 people because they deemed them potential risks. According to Payne, the Nationalists carried out similar executions in the towns of Seville, Cordoba, Granada, and Malaga.⁹⁷

Clearly, the Spanish Civil War was a time of horror that resulted in thousands of political executions on both sides. According to Payne, it is estimated that the Republicans were responsible for 56,000 executions during the three years of war. The Nationalists are estimated to be responsible for at least 70,000 killings during the war, to which another 28,000 may be added for repressions after the war ended.⁹⁸ The conclusion of the civil war

⁹³ Payne, 106.

⁹⁴ Payne, 105.

⁹⁵ Payne, 107.

⁹⁶ Payne, 108.

⁹⁷ Payne, 109.

⁹⁸ Payne, 110.

brought an end to a two-way political war and gave way to the authoritarian fascist regime that would continue to repress Spain for another 36 years.

C. THE FRANCO REGIME’S REPRESSIONS

The end of the civil war resulted in the defeat of the Republicans and allowed Franco to assume total political power to rule Spain. This power also allowed Franco to embark on a crusade against the Republicans and to continue the execution and other brutal repressions against his political enemies. Franco and his supporters resumed the systematic prosecutions and thousands of death rulings, with executions on a large scale, immediately after the end of the war.⁹⁹ The regime used the military justice system in an attempt to maintain appearances of legality for the thousands of executions that were being carried out. Franco provided a summary of the death penalties imposed by his regime, and he estimated that his regime had carried out 51,000 total executions, 28,000 of them after the end of the civil war (1939–1942).¹⁰⁰ However, recent research claims that there were around 50,000 executions in the immediate years of the civil war.¹⁰¹ The fortunate survivors, those whose lives were spared from execution, were sent to prison or forced labor camps—resulting in thousands of men and women imprisonments or sent to Francoist concentration camps. According to Beevor, approximately 500,000 political prisoners were sent to camps or prisons around the country during the Franco regime.¹⁰² At least 20,000 of these political prisoners were forced to work on the Valley of the Fallen monument, a Francoist regime monument that still stands today.¹⁰³ Francisco Franco, the fascist leader, after the Spanish Civil War, continued to oppress the Spanish population and established

⁹⁹ Payne, 107.

¹⁰⁰ Payne, 110.

¹⁰¹ Julius Ruiz, “A Spanish Genocide? Reflections on the Francoist Repression after the Spanish Civil War,” *Contemporary European History: Cambridge* 14, no. 2 (May 2005): 171, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/204204079/abstract/1E2CD3CA4F9446CBPQ/1>.

¹⁰² Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 404.

¹⁰³ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2007), 313.

an authoritarian regime that would taint far-right politics for almost forty years after his death.

1. Autonomous Regions

Franco's repressions also targeted the autonomous regions. Franco envisioned a centralized nation-state that spoke only Castilian Spanish and profoundly opposed the regional autonomy granted by the Republicans to Catalan and Basque provinces. The unifying objective of Spain meant imposing a single national Spanish culture and language. Franco's hostility toward regionalism led to the passing of a series of repressive laws, which abolished Catalan and Basque regional autonomy obtained during the Second Republic and banned them from speaking regional languages in public and displaying cultural symbols such as regional flags or signs.¹⁰⁴ According to Gunther, the use of Catalan and Basque in publications, legal courts, and religious services was permanently prohibited, and Franco's regime forced the regions to use Castilian.¹⁰⁵

Franco blamed the Republicans for the political violence experienced before and during the civil war and passed the 1939 law of political responsibilities (*Ley de Responsabilidades Politicas* [LRP]) to legalize the regime's repressions against the Republicans. LRP assigned the political blame to all that participated in or supported any efforts against the Nationalists before and during the civil war. This law also allowed all levels of sentencing, including the death penalty, life-term imprisonments, and forced labor in concentration camps for up to 30 years.¹⁰⁶ The implementation of LRP provided the regime the legality that allowed the political repressions intended to eliminate all support for the Republicans. This law also created enough terror in the population to prevent any future opposition to the regime from any existing political parties.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Gunther, *Spain after Franco: The Making of a Competitive Party System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 21.

¹⁰⁵ Gunther, 22.

¹⁰⁶ Gunther, 25.

2. The Media

The Spanish media were also under substantial dictatorial control during the authoritarian regime. Franco passed the Press Law of 1938 during the civil war, and it remained in effect for nearly three decades.¹⁰⁷ According to Gunther, the Press Law required the state's approval for all publications, and it also provided the state the authority to suspend any publication without reason.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, it allowed the state to appoint or dismiss newspaper managers and editors, even those privately owned. Journalists were under strict scrutiny and were required to submit their intended publications daily to allow the state to eliminate any reports that may have been critical of the dictatorship. Radio stations also came under heavy scrutiny and control of the government. The regime seized the pro-Republican stations and allowed only pro-Nationalist stations to remain in business. Even these allied stations were also required to submit their planned broadcasts to the state for approval to prevent any news critical of the regime from being broadcasted.¹⁰⁹ The Spanish population, under the Franco regime, experienced continuous oppression of their freedom of speech and opinion, which also set a bad reputation for the fascist dictatorship and later for far-right politics.

3. Political Parties

Political parties were outlawed throughout the Franco regime, and the underground Republican parties were subject to persecution. According to Gunther, the only political party accepted by the regime was the Movimiento Nacional (National Movement), a faction of the fascist party Falange España.¹¹⁰ Spain became and remained a single political party state throughout the authoritarian regime because of Franco's beliefs. Franco believed that the collapse of civil order during the Second Republic was caused by the "self-serving behavior of elected officials" and that the competing political parties divided

¹⁰⁷ Richard Gunther, José Ramón Montero, and José Ignacio Wert, "The Media and Politics in Spain: From Dictatorship to Democracy" (working paper, Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 1999), 5.

¹⁰⁸ Gunther, Montero, and Wert, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Gunther, Montero, and Wert, 7.

¹¹⁰ Gunther, 22.

Spain into opposing factions.¹¹¹ It was not until the release of the *Political Reform Law* during the transition to democracy in October 1976 that the fascist party Movimiento Nacional was finally terminated, and political parties were legalized to allow their participation in the first post-Franco democratic elections held in 1977.¹¹² The Political Reform Law was one of the first reforms passed to facilitate the transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

D. TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

After the death of Franco in 1975, the political environment became fluid and delicate due to the risk of the eruption of violence. The transition to democracy demanded that Spaniards overlook the Franco regime repressions and thousands of executions because prosecuting them could jeopardize the transition pact. The socio-cultural basis for the transition was the remembrance of the civil war as a tragedy for which both sides shared equal responsibility, a social memory summed up in the slogans “Never again” and “We were all guilty.”¹¹³

1. The Amnesty Law

After the death of Francisco Franco, Spain’s politicians, in an effort to have a smooth transition to democracy, agreed on the “Pact of Forgetting,” a pact whose primary purpose was to leave the brutalities of the civil war and the fascist regime in the past.¹¹⁴ Initially, this pact was a tacit agreement that was not formalized or discussed in public. In other words, there was no written document explaining the details of the pact or specifying penalties for its violation. However, in October 1977, Spain passed an Amnesty law, *Ley 46/1977 de Amnistia*, to legally enforce the tacit agreement.

¹¹¹ Gunther, 22.

¹¹² Gunther, 36.

¹¹³ Carolyn P. Boyd, “The Politics of History and Memory in Democratic Spain,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617, no. 1 (May 2008): 136, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312760>.

¹¹⁴ Omar Guillermo Encarnación, *Democracy without Justice in Spain: The Politics of Forgetting*, Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 29.

The first democratically elected parliament passed the 1977 Amnesty law with inputs from former politicians of the Franco regime in order to avoid a return to political violence. The law pardoned all political crimes committed during both the civil war and the Franco regime by both the Republicans and the Nationalists.¹¹⁵ Although there was a consensus agreement about “forgetting” the atrocities committed by both parties during the civil war and fascist regime, the Republicans felt a sense of injustice regarding the cruelties that they endured under the Franco regime.¹¹⁶ To avoid the instigation of any political upheaval from the Right, the provisional government allowed the state administration and the judiciary of Franco loyalists to retain their government positions and to provide inputs for the 1978 constitution. Boyd contends that the fear of military action experienced during the Second Republic justified to many Spaniards the pact of “forgetting” and they chose to support it to facilitate the transition toward a democratic Spain.¹¹⁷

Spain’s transition included the decentralization of the state, which triggered the beginning of the return of regional parties, identities, and symbols, such as flags that were forbidden under Franco. These developments put an end to the Francoist view of Spain as a culturally monolithic nation and regarded the Francoist legacy as old, authoritarian, and extremely nationalist. The Francoist/fascist practices were supplanted with the notion of Spain as a “modern, democratic, and multicultural society” that remained determined not to return to the old fascist repressions.¹¹⁸ These developments made the radical right-wing parties’ nativist or xenophobic discourses stand in direct opposition to these ideals, and thus they were not adopted by any political party until the arrival of Vox.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Andrea Hepworth, “From Survivor to Fourth-Generation Memory: Literal and Discursive Sites of Memory in Post-Dictatorship Germany and Spain,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 54, no. 1 (2019): 153, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009417694429>.

¹¹⁶ Encarnación, *Democracy without Justice in Spain*, 29.

¹¹⁷ Boyd, 135.

¹¹⁸ Omar G. Encarnacion, “The Politics of Immigration: Why Spain Is Different,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (October 1, 2004): 180, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10474552-15-4-167>.

¹¹⁹ Encarnacion, 180.

2. Democratic Elections

The selection of political strategies was critical for the 1977 democratic election because of the highly fluid political environment. Three of the six largest parties had historical roots in the civil war, which presented challenges on strategy selection. According to Gunther, the voters' views and assessments of these parties were profoundly affected by "historical memories" and the parties faced challenges to overcome the images acquired during the civil war.¹²⁰ Even newly formed parties, such as the Alianza Popular (AP), whose founders were officials in the Franco regime, were regarded as parties that would attempt to carry on the Franco regime's legacy, thus making it challenging for them to obtain votes.¹²¹

The 1977 election results demonstrated the population's support for political parties that promoted democracy and the rejection of Neo-Francoist parties. The Left-wing parties Union de Centro Democratico (UCD) and Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Worker's Party - PSOE) gained the majority of the votes with 34 percent and 28.9 percent of the total votes, respectively. Alianza Popular, considered a Right of center party, won 8 percent of the votes and managed to gain representation in the new parliament.¹²² However, Fuerza Nueva (FN), a party of the extreme Right that promoted the continuation of the Franco regime, was denied parliamentary representation by receiving less than one percent of the votes.¹²³

Two years later, the results of the 1979 election confirmed the Spanish electorate's support for democracy but witnessed the first electoral victory of an extreme right Francoist party. The UCD was the biggest winner, receiving 35.1 percent of the votes, followed by the PSOE, which received 30.5 percent. The AP lost nearly two points from the previous election, receiving 6.1 percent. For the first time since the return to democracy, an extreme

¹²⁰ Gunther, 6.

¹²¹ Gunther, 5.

¹²² Gunther, 38.

¹²³ Gunther, 204.

right party, Fuerza Nueva, managed to gain enough support to win one seat in the Congress of deputies.¹²⁴

The 1982 election drastically altered the political arena and positioned the Left coalition in the lead for more than a decade. All parties experienced a substantial change in their constituency that manifested their desire for change in government and placed PSOE as the leading party. PSOE received a substantial share of the votes, 48.4 percent, and the UCD, who was in second place in the previous election, received only 6.5 percent.¹²⁵ The AP, a party that received very little support in the previous election and was at risk of collapsing, received 26.5 percent of total votes and increased its parliamentary delegation from nine to 106 seats, emerging as the main opposition party.¹²⁶ Gunther contends that the extreme right was defeated, as Fuerza Nueva received less than one hundred thousand votes (0.5 percent) and disintegrated after its embarrassing defeat.¹²⁷

After the 1982 election, it was apparent that the extreme Right was defeated, and its chances of returning and gaining electoral support seemed very faint. The AP, although on the center-right side of the political spectrum, remained conservative and kept a distance from the far-right rhetoric that could be associated with Francoism.¹²⁸ The 1982 election also marked the start of a two-party system dominated by PSOE and Alianza Popular, later rebranded Popular Party (PP). PSOE continued to receive electoral success until the 1993 elections, in which it was forced to form a coalition government to remain in power. However, just three years later (1996), the Popular Party finally came to power with the support of various regional-nationalist parties.¹²⁹ According to Gunther, PP was able to secure the majority of seats in the Congress of Deputies in the 2000 general election and

¹²⁴ Casanova, 205.

¹²⁵ Richard Gunther, *Democracy in Modern Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 207.

¹²⁶ Gunther, 207.

¹²⁷ Gunther, 207.

¹²⁸ Gunther, *Spain after Franco*, 82.

¹²⁹ Gunther, 203.

was able to remain in power until 2004 without the support of any other party. The PSOE won the election in 2004 and retained the majority of seats until the 2011 election, in which PP won the majority of votes and remained in the lead until 2018. PSOE's leader, Pedro Sanchez, assumed the role of Prime Minister in June 2018 after holding a vote of no-confidence against the PP leader, Mariano Rajoy, due to a corruption scandal that involved top officials of the party.¹³⁰ Although the parties of the Right appeared defeated, and no other radical or extreme party gained electoral support since Fuerza Nueva in the 1979 national election, the electoral success of Vox that began in the 2018 Andalusian regional election, has altered the political arena for the future ahead.

E. CONCLUSION

The end of the Spanish exceptionalism to radical right-wing parties came in 2018 with the ascendance of Vox into the regional parliament of Andalucía. Given the scope of political violence and repressions experienced in Spain since the establishment of the Second Republic—during the civil war and the Franco regime by the repressive forces of the Political Right, the Spaniards excluded these parties from the electoral alternative, and the ascendance of an extreme or radical right-wing party appeared inconceivable.

Any accounting for the absence of radical Right-wing political movements in Spain must take into consideration the problems the radical Right has had in reconstituting itself in the aftermath of the demise of Franco's extreme-right, nationalist dictatorship and its historical association with fascism. The radical Right ruled the country for nearly four decades and denied the nation's fundamental civil and political rights, and it is for these reasons that the radical Right was an entirely discredited political force in Spain. The recent memory of its fascist past, in turn, made the country one of the most politically liberal environments in Western Europe, a development with significant implications for the pursuit of nationalistic and anti-immigrant politics. However, the rise of Vox and the electorate's acceptance of such discourses suggests that the nationalistic and anti-immigrant rhetoric has returned to Spain.

¹³⁰ "Spain's Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, Is Ousted in No-Confidence Vote," *New York Times*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/01/world/europe/spain-mariano-rajoy-no-confidence.html>.

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III. THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY OF IMMIGRATION

In 2018, Spain's southern region of Andalusia experienced a drastic increase in immigration through the Strait of Gibraltar, which became a central topic in the media and was exploited by Vox as one of its main issues. Vox campaigned vigorously against immigration leading up to the December 2018 Andalusian regional election, in which it achieved 11 percent of the votes and 12 seats in the regional parliament.¹³¹ By comparison, Vox participated in the 2015 Andalusian election—a year that immigration was not considered an issue by the population and Vox did not spread an anti-immigration message and received only 18,422 votes, falling significantly short from gaining representation in the regional parliament.¹³² This chapter examines the 2018 immigration increase in Spain and the challenges that it created in the southern region of Andalusia and determined that the increase of immigration and the challenges it created in the region of Andalucía increased the citizen's concerns over immigration. The challenges associated with the rapid increase of immigration undeniably increased the Spanish population's concern over immigration, but it was ultimately the mainstream parties' failure to address the issue of immigration that provided Vox the political opportunity to address citizens' growing concern over immigration to garner voters' political support.

A. IMMIGRATION IN SPAIN

Immigration into southern Spain is not a new phenomenon. Due to circular migration (temporary movement of migrant workers between home and employment areas) from Morocco, Spain did not have a domestic law to regulate the rights and responsibilities of foreigners until 1985.¹³³ The unregulated immigration into Spain from Morocco and

¹³¹ Sam Jones, "Far Right Breakthrough in Andalucía Send Shockwave through Spanish Politics," *Guardian*, December 9, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/09/far-right-andalucia-seville-vox-party-shockwave-spanish-politics>.

¹³² "Elecciones al Parlamento de Andalucía 2015," Resultados Provisionales—Andalucía, accessed August 29, 2019, http://www.resultadoseleccionesparlamentoandalucia2015.es/01AU/DAU01999CM_L1.htm.

¹³³ Joaquin Arango and Philip Martin, "Best Practices to Manage Migration: Morocco-Spain," *The International Migration Review* 39, no. 1 (2005): 258–69, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27645483>.

the need to meet the European Union's acceptance criteria led Spain to release the "Foreigner Law" in 1985, designed to provide foreigners with procedures toward residency and legalization of foreigners in Spain.¹³⁴ According to Bodega, the 1985 law did not decrease the flow of immigrants from Morocco and instead increased the number of illegal aliens in Spain for the next five years.¹³⁵ Due to the failed 1985 law and pressure from the European Community (EC), Spain introduced a visa requirement in 1991 to control the flow of immigrants from Morocco. The visa requirement proved useful to significantly reduce the number of illegal Moroccans entering Spain; however, the illegal crossings via the Strait of Gibraltar persisted and continue to be a challenge today.

In an effort to further control illegal migration from northern Africa, Spain and Morocco signed the 1992 Spain-Morocco readmission agreement. The agreement described the coordination between both nations to prevent illegal immigration from reaching Spanish shores, and it also detailed procedures that allowed Spain to return illegal migrants to Morocco.¹³⁶ Additionally, in 2001, both countries signed the labor agreement that allowed Morocco to send migrants to Spain to work in the agricultural sector while preventing irregular migrants from departing its coast.¹³⁷

It is estimated that in 2002, there were 600,000 illegal immigrants living in Spain, 25 percent of them from Morocco.¹³⁸ Since the enforcement of visa requirements took hold, Moroccans have continued to cross the Straits of Gibraltar illegally in small boats called "Peretas" by the Spaniards. To reduce illegal crossings further, Spain launched the Integrated Systems of Exterior Surveillance (SIVE) in 2002. The SIVE system was installed in the area of the Gibraltar Straits and Canary Islands, boosting the number of

¹³⁴ Isabel Bodega et al., "Recent Migrations from Morocco to Spain," *The International Migration Review* 29, no. 3 (1995): 800–819, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2547506>.

¹³⁵ Bodega et al., 810.

¹³⁶ Francesca Pizzutelli, "The 1992 Spain–Morocco Readmission Agreement * in English and Spanish," *The Rights Angle* (blog), December 19, 2013, <https://therightsangle.wordpress.com/2013/12/19/the-1992-spanish-morocco-readmission-agreement-in-english/>.

¹³⁷ Carmen Enriquez, "Temporary Migration between Morocco and Spain (ARI)," Elcano," accessed February 20, 2019, http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ARI111-2011.

¹³⁸ Arango and Martin.

apprehensions from 3,600 the previous year to 18,000 migrants attempting to cross the Strait of Gibraltar to reach Spain.¹³⁹

From 2002 to 2017, Spain was able to keep irregular immigration under control due to SIVE and Moroccan cooperation to keep the Western route closed. However, trade disagreements between Morocco and the European Union (EU) jeopardized the effective closure of the Western Mediterranean route. In February 2017, the European Union Court of Justice ruled unfavorably on a Morocco and Western Sahara trade agreement, which incited the Moroccan government to use immigration as a bargaining tool.¹⁴⁰ In return, Morocco threatened to open its borders to emigration into Spain if the EU did not honor the original agricultural agreement signed in 2012.¹⁴¹ It is, therefore, likely not a coincidence that the number of migrants entering Spain increased starting in 2017.

B. IMMIGRATION INCREASE

The rapid increase of migrants arriving into Spain since 2017 serves as evidence that Morocco loosened its borders. The European Union's Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) reported that the EU's external illegal border-crossings decreased by a quarter in 2018 from the previous year.¹⁴² However, while Frontex figures indicated an overall decrease of illegal entries to the EU, they also indicated a record number of immigrants arriving in Spain. In 2017, Spain received 22,414 migrants via the Strait of Gibraltar, but the number more than doubled in 2018, with the country receiving 58,569 migrants, making it the most active EU migratory route that year.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Arango and Martin.

¹⁴⁰ Ignacio Cembrero, "Marruecos Amenaza con Reabrir el Grifo de la Emigración a España," *El Confidencial*, February 11, 2017, https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2017-02-07/marruecos-europa-emigracion-espana-acuerdo-agricola-sahara_1327638/.

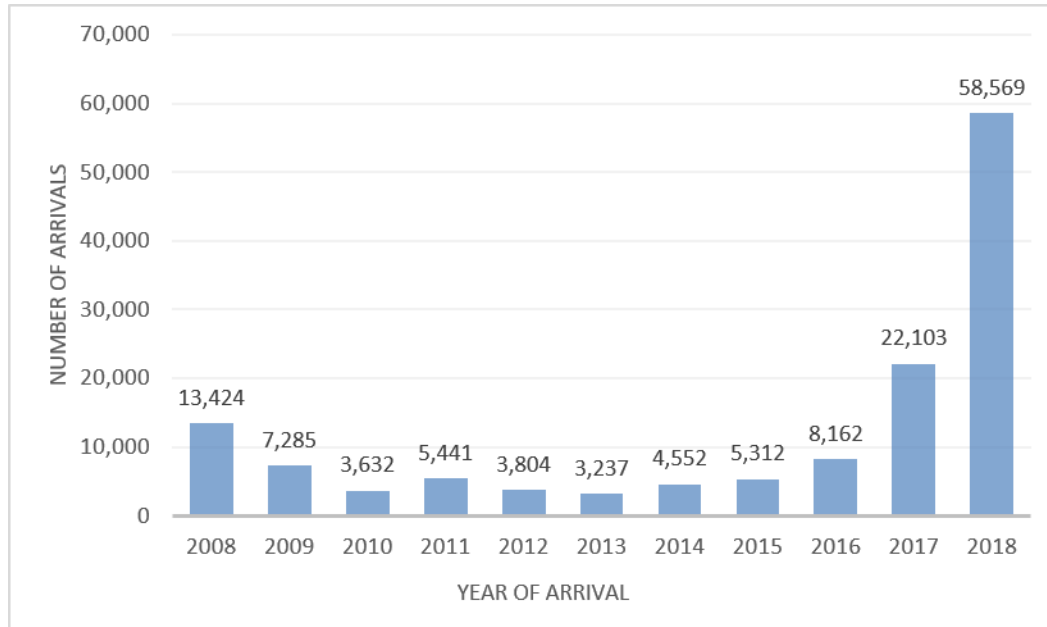
¹⁴¹ Cembrero.

¹⁴² Frontex News, "Number of Irregular Crossings at Europe's Borders At Lowest level in 5 Years," news release, April 1, 2019, <https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news-release/number-of-irregular-crossings-at-europe-s-borders-at-lowest-level-in-5-years-ZfkoRu>.

¹⁴³ Jessica Jones, "EU Illegal Migrants Hit Five-Year Low as Spain Becomes Main Gateway Europe," *Telegraph*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/05/eu-illegal-migrants-hit-five-year-low-spain-becomes-new-gateway/>.

Table 1 shows the controlled flow of immigration from 2008 to 2016 and the abrupt increase in 2017 and 2018.

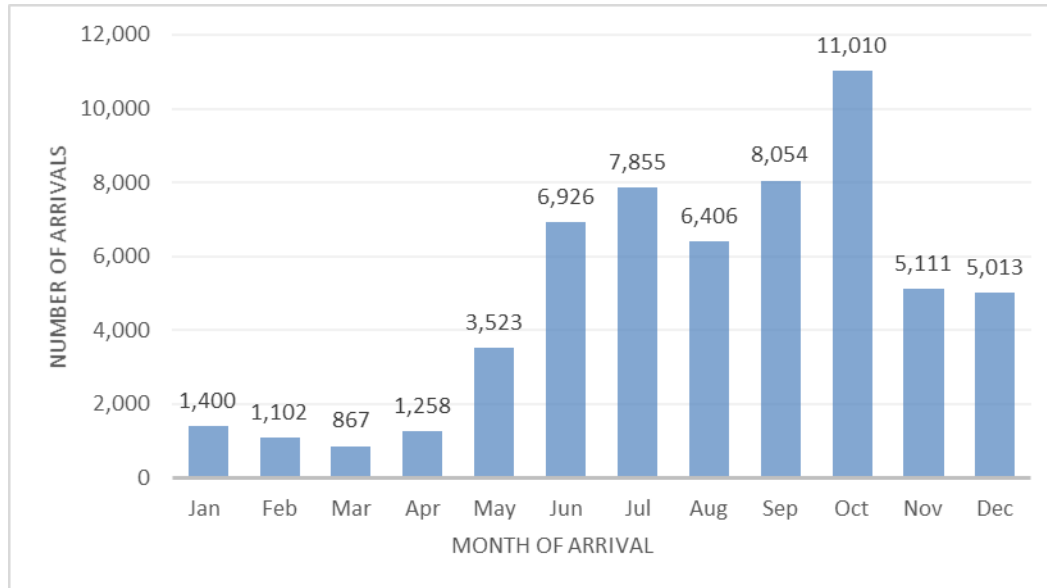
Table 1. Immigrant Arrivals to Spain via the Strait of Gibraltar (2008–2018)¹⁴⁴



This table shows that immigration was not an issue for Spain from 2008 to 2016; therefore, the political opportunity was not available to political parties to exploit immigration as a main issue. However, Table 2 shows the gradual increase of immigrant arrivals that took place from June 2018 until December 2018, which coincided with the Andalusian election.

¹⁴⁴ Adapted from Flow Monitoring, “Europe.”

Table 2. Immigrant Arrivals to Spain via the Strait of Gibraltar (2018)¹⁴⁵



One can expect citizens' concern over immigration to increase starting in July as the results of the June arrivals did not get reported until July. The unexpected and drastic increase of immigration in 2018 created significant challenges in Spain's southern region of Andalusia and its institutions, and the media coverage of these challenges likely increased citizens' concerns over immigration. Indeed, Smith asserts that voters often are influenced by the news coverage of certain issues to decide what issues are most important.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, Smith contends that although the media "primes the issue," the electorate will support the political party that is perceived as the "most competent at solving the issues that dominate the news."¹⁴⁷ As Spanish mainstream parties on both the center-left and center-right failed to articulate immigration policy alternatives that addressed the immigration concerns of the Spanish electorate, Vox was provided the political opportunity to exploit the immigration issue to garner political support.

¹⁴⁵ Adapted from Flow Monitoring.

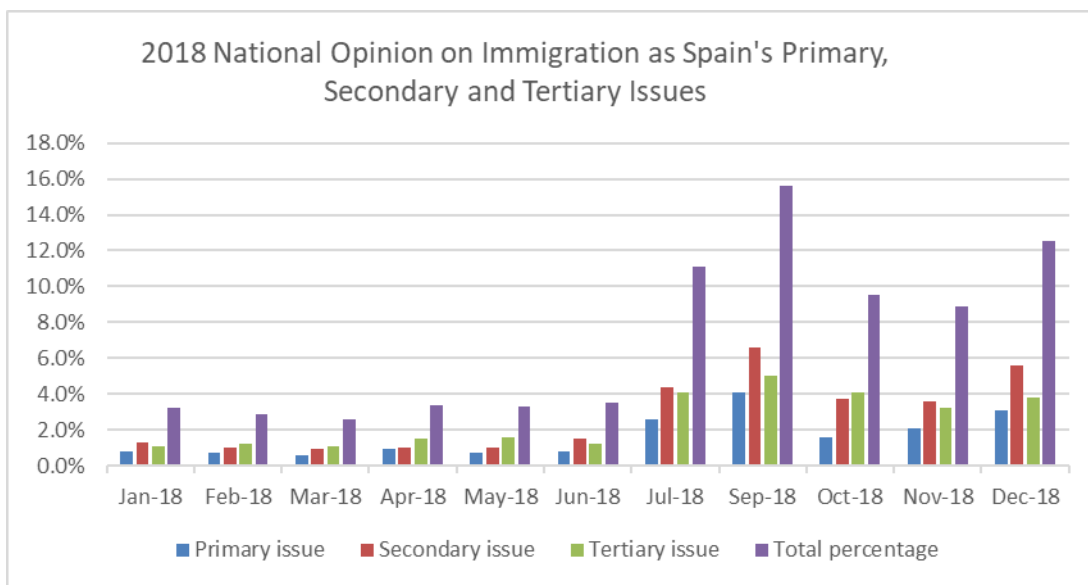
¹⁴⁶ Smith.

¹⁴⁷ Smith.

C. NATIONAL CONCERN OVER IMMIGRATION

Opinion polls support the assertion that the drastic surge of immigrants and their impact on the Southern region of Andalusia increased the concern over immigration in Spain at a national level. The opinion polls conducted by the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) shown in Table 3 reveal that the citizens' concerns over immigration increased as the number of arrivals surged starting in June 2018.

Table 3. National Opinion on Immigration as a Main Issue (2018) ¹⁴⁸

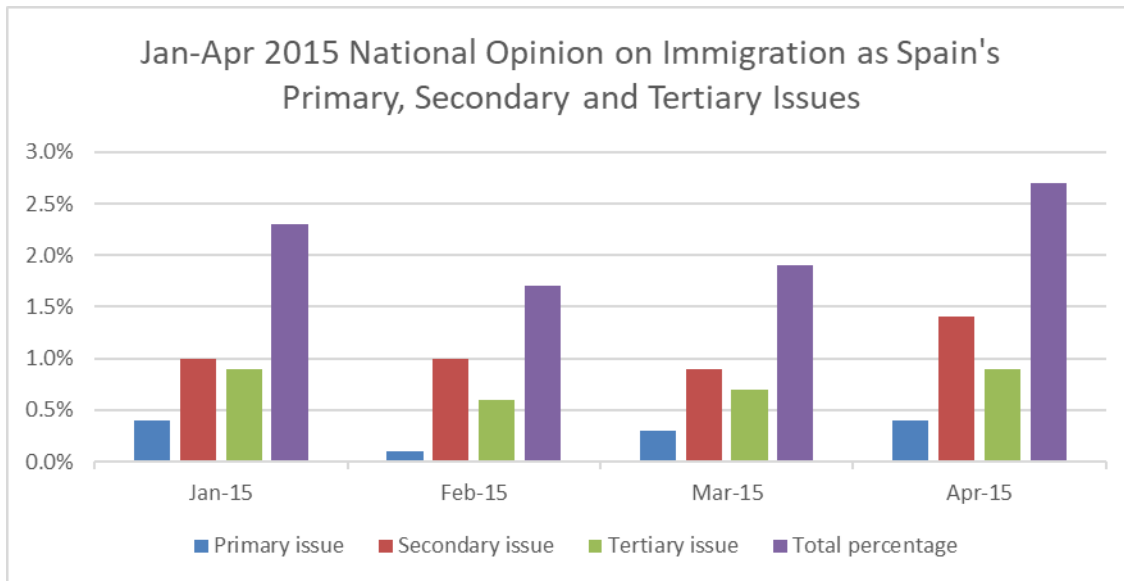


This table also shows that the concern over immigration remained low and steady from January to June 2018 as immigration levels remained relatively low. The total percentage of citizens' concern over immigration as a primary, secondary, and tertiary main issue remained below 3.5 percent during the first half of 2018. This low level of concern over immigration correlates with the low number of immigrant arrivals shown in Table 2. However, as immigration increased beginning in June, the citizens' concern increased from 3.5 percent in June to 11.1 percent in July as the results for June do not get published until early July. Polls were not conducted for August, but it can be surmised that

¹⁴⁸ Adapted from "Barómetros," CIS, accessed February 3, 2020, http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/11_barometros/index.jsp.

the concern remained high as September showed the highest level of concern of the year with 15.6 percent. Comparatively, Table 4 shows the inconsequential level of concern of Spanish citizens from January to April 2015, a period that covers before and after the previous Andalusian regional election held in March 2015, in which Vox only received 0.46 percent of the votes, a significantly big difference from the 2018 elections.¹⁴⁹

Table 4. National Opinion on Immigration as a Main Issue (January–April 2015)¹⁵⁰



This table indicates that in March 2015, only 0.3 percent of the respondents considered immigration as Spain’s primary issue, 0.9 percent considered it as secondary, and 0.7 percent as the third primary issue. The low number of immigrants did not create the challenges that Spain faced due to the 2018 immigration increase explained in the next section, therefore immigration did not provide Vox a political opportunity to address voter’s concerns over immigration because it was clearly not an issue, so running a campaign on anti-immigration rhetoric would not have garnered support for Vox.

¹⁴⁹ Resultados Provisionales—Andalucía.

¹⁵⁰ Adapted from CIS, “Barómetros.”

Comparing Vox's electoral outcome from the March 2015 election and the voter's concerns over immigration indicate that the political opportunity was not available for Vox to exploit immigration as a central issue.

Immigration was not even on the radar of Vox during the campaign for the 2015 Andalusian election. During a January 2015 interview, Vox's leader, Santiago Abascal stated his party's priorities for elections, and he did not mention immigration as a primary issue. Instead, Abascal mentioned Catalonia separatism and the corruption within the government as the Party's primary concerns.¹⁵¹ Abascal's response coincided with the events that were important for the Spanish population at that time, as the Catalan region attempted to hold a referendum vote to become an independent state a few months prior.¹⁵² However, Vox made immigration one of its main issues during its 2018 Andalusian regional election campaign and proposed immigration policies that acknowledged voters' increasing concern.

D. THE POLITICIZATION OF IMMIGRATION

The surge of immigration in 2018 became a central topic in the December Andalusian election and allowed Vox to use the issue to garner electoral support. The immigration surges of 2017 and 2018 created challenges for the region of Andalusia which overwhelmed its institutions and increased media coverage of the issue. Immigrants reached the Andalusian coasts daily and placed an unmanageable strain on shelters located in the southern coastal municipalities of Andalusia. With an average of 200 migrants arriving daily in 2018, shelters often had difficulty managing the considerable influx and were unable to provide care to all migrants, leaving some without a proper place to sleep.¹⁵³ At one point, Andalusia received 1,300 migrants in three days, which pushed services to the breaking point. Shelters often reached maximum capacity, forcing local

¹⁵¹ "Entrevista a Santiago Abascal En Al Rojo Vivo— 19/01/2015," January 19, 2015, posted by Isaac Jiménez, YouTube video, :30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h36nFy0NLNo>.

¹⁵² Lauren Frayer, "Catalonia Votes for Independence; Spain Says It Won't Happen," NPR, November 10, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/11/10/362952892/referendums-outcome-indicates-catalonias-desire-for-independence>.

¹⁵³ Cañas and Sáiz, "Migrant Arrivals Push Shelters to Breaking Point in Southern Spain."

governments to convert sports centers, police stations and industrial buildings into processing centers.¹⁵⁴ Immigration officials traveled to the most affected areas to find solutions but recognized the gravity of the situation and described it as a “collapse of services” and reported as many as 400 migrants lacked a place to sleep.¹⁵⁵

Because shelters were unable to house the increased number of migrants, the Spanish government resorted to having migrants sleep on the deck of maritime rescue ships, in courtyards of police stations and port facilities warehouses.¹⁵⁶ According to *El País* news, rescued migrants spend a maximum of 72 hours in police custody; once released, many migrants are released into society without accountability due to lack of housing facilities.¹⁵⁷ The shortage of space to house migrants was highlighted even further when 500 Algerian migrants were rescued from the sea by the Spanish Coast guard, and the government approved their detention in a prison facility that was still under construction. The government stated that this was an extraordinary and necessary exemption as there were not enough rooms to house them.¹⁵⁸

Even as the Andalusian region was struggling with immigration, the central government conceded to international pressure to support the migrant crisis. In June 2018, the Spanish Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez agreed for Spain to receive 629 migrants rescued off the coast of Libya, as the then Italy’s newly elected minister of interior, Matteo Salvini, a hard-anti-immigrant and leader of the right-wing party Lega, refused to allow the rescue ships to dock in Italian ports.¹⁵⁹ The standoff forced the rescue ship to remain stranded out at sea for almost a week until Sanchez agreed to accept them

¹⁵⁴ Jamie Prentis, “Spain’s Algeciras Overwhelmed by Migrant Arrivals,” *The National*, accessed February 21, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/europe/spain-s-algeciras-overwhelmed-by-migrant-arrivals-1.757172>.

¹⁵⁵ Cañas and Sáiz.

¹⁵⁶ Cañas and Sáiz.

¹⁵⁷ Cañas and Sáiz.

¹⁵⁸ Raphael Minder, “Short on Space for Migrants, Spain Sent Them to a Town’s New Prison,” *New York Times*, October 15, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/world/europe/spain-migrants-prison.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Steve Scherer, “Italy Cries Victory as Spain Opens Port to Rescued Migrants,” *Reuters*, June 11, 2018, <https://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKBN1J710B>.

in Spain. Matteo Salvini claimed the deflection of the migrants a “victory” for Italy, and its prime minister claimed that Italy was “no longer alone” on immigration issues and that it was time for the EU to modify asylum rules.¹⁶⁰

Sanchez’s actions might have been humanitarian and generous, but they also drew negative criticism from the right-wing party Vox and the center-right Popular Party. Vox claimed that Sanchez’s actions were “a propaganda operation disguised as a humanitarian gesture” and also stated that the decision to open Spain to immigrants would send a signal to other migrants to risk the journey to Spain.¹⁶¹ Similarly, the Popular Party also called Sanchez’s actions irresponsible and that they would create a “pull factor” for migrants trying to reach Europe.¹⁶²

In July 2018, the Spanish maritime rescue agency released an urgent request for assistance due to the surging number of immigrants crossing the Mediterranean. The call came after maritime rescue centers rescued 2,000 immigrants in one week alone.¹⁶³ The maritime agency reported insufficient crew levels to sustain the continuous rescue missions and indicated that crew reinforcement was necessary to continue their efforts.¹⁶⁴ The European Commission agreed, in August 2018, to provide Spain with 3 million euros to support the management of the overwhelming number of immigrant arrivals via the Strait of Gibraltar—most of the funds were directed to cover the costs of the deployment of extra staff maritime rescue agencies from other regions.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Scherer.

¹⁶¹ Gabriel de la Iglesia, “VOX Considera que Las Primeras Decisiones de Sánchez «no Pueden Conducir a Nada Bueno»,” BURGOSconecta, June 21, 2018, <https://www.burgosconecta.es/burgos/considera-primeras-decisiones-20180621203018-nt.html>.

¹⁶² Isla Benie, “Spain to Invest \$35 Million in Initial Costs of Migrant Influx,” Reuters, July 30, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-spain/spain-to-invest-35-million-in-initial-costs-of-migrant-influx-idUSKBN1KK1W6>

¹⁶³ Hannah Strange, “Spain’s Overwhelmed Coastguard Says It Can’t Cope with Migrant Influx, as 700 Rescued in One Morning,” *Telegraph*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/07/27/spains-overwhelmed-coastguard-says-cant-cope-migrant-influx/>.

¹⁶⁴ Strange.

¹⁶⁵ Gabriela Galindo, “EU Grants Spain €3 Million in Emergency Migration Funds,” Politico, August 3, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/spain-migration-eu-grants-3-million-in-emergency-funds/>.

The increase of immigration and the challenges it presented to the region of Andalusia became a well-known issue in Spain, which increased voters' awareness and concern over immigration. The citizens' concern over immigration and the failure of mainstream parties to articulate policies to address those concerns created the opportunity for Vox to use its anti-immigration platform as a lever to garner votes. Vox's leaders consistently declared at rallies that migrants were "invaders coming to replace Spaniards."¹⁶⁶ As the Andalusian pre-election polls began to predict electoral fortune for Vox, the leader of the Popular party started to address the issue of immigration by stating that "there isn't unlimited room for all migrants to come to Spain" and that if migrants fail to assimilate or did not respect the laws of Spain "they have come to the wrong place".¹⁶⁷ A desperate act by the PP that further legitimized Vox's immigration theme. According to Eatwell, addressing the radical right's themes, especially about immigration, only legitimizes the party's political discourse.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the integration of the radical right's topics into the mainstream parties' discourse normalizes the emergent party's positions (especially regarding immigration) and may become a crucial element to obtain electoral support.¹⁶⁹

E. POLITICAL PARTIES' POSITIONS ON IMMIGRATION

A breakdown of the Andalusian regional government's coalition led to the 2018 elections that provided Vox its first victory. PSOE had been in control of the Andalusian regional government since 1982, but finally lost control of the regional government in the 2018 elections, in which Vox played kingmaker to form a regional coalition government

¹⁶⁶ Eva Sáiz, Ana Marcos, and Javier Martín-Arroyo, "La Ausencia de Debate Migratorio Amplifica el Mensaje de Vox y Casado," *El País*, December 1, 2018, https://elpais.com/politica/2018/11/28/actualidad/1543434990_381282.html.

¹⁶⁷ Granada Agencias, "Casado, a los Inmigrantes: O Respetan Las Costumbres Occidentales o Se Equivocan de País," *la Vanguardia*, November 24, 2018, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20181124/453125235123/pablo-casado-pp-inmigrantes-costumbres-pais-andalucia.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Eatwell, 58.

¹⁶⁹ Dennis Spies and Simon T. Franzmann, "A Two-Dimensional Approach to the Political Opportunity Structure of Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe," *West European Politics* 34, no. 5 (September 2011): 1049, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2011.591096>.

with the center-right Popular Party and Citizens' party.¹⁷⁰ PSOE won the majority of the votes in the 2015 Andalusian regional election but required Citizens' party support to form a government. After three years of governance, the regional president and leader of the PSOE's regional party, Susana Díaz, called snap elections in October 2018 when the Citizens' party withdrew support from the coalition the previous month.¹⁷¹ The rupture of the Andalusian coalition government during a high level of immigration and the failure of mainstream parties to address voters' concerns, provided Vox the political opportunity to address the immigration issue leading up to the regional election, which provided its first electoral victory since its establishment in 2014.

1. Mainstream Parties on Immigration

Leading up to the 2018 Andalusia regional election, the mainstream parties' position on immigration was essential for Vox. The mainstream parties were the PSOE, PP, the center-right Citizens' party and the left-wing Adelante Andalucía (AA), as Vox remained irrelevant until after the elections. The programs and political position of the PSOE on immigration remained liberal and accommodating to immigrants. In October 2018, the PSOE's Andalusian secretary of immigration introduced policies that proposed the distribution of immigrants in all Spanish autonomous regions and Europe in an effort to lighten the immigration burden to the region.¹⁷²

The Popular Party's electoral program acknowledged the growing issue of immigration and the challenges it presented to the region. However, the PP did not take a hard-liner position against immigration, instead, it proposed broader coordination with the national government to receive more substantial support to properly care for arriving

¹⁷⁰ Raphael Minder, "Spain's Far-Right Vox Party Sees Breakout Moment in New Election," *New York Times*, February 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/16/world/europe/spain-elections-vox-far-right.html>.

¹⁷¹ Paloma Esteban, "La Ejecutiva de Ciudadanos Aprobó Romper el Pacto con Susana Díaz," *El Confidencial*, September 7, 2018, https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/andalucia/2018-09-07/ejecutiva-ciudadanos-pacto-rompe-susana-diaz-elecciones_1612818/.

¹⁷² "Beatriz Rubiño Subraya el Esfuerzo Andalúz En Atención a Inmigrantes E Insiste En la Responsabilidad Compartida," *PSOE Andalucía*, October 13, 2018, <https://www.psoeandalucia.com/beatriz-rubino-subraya-el-esfuerzo-andaluz-en-atencion-a-inmigrantes-e-insiste-en-la-responsabilidad-compartida/>.

migrants.¹⁷³ The Citizens' party electoral program for the 2018 Andalusian election did not mention immigration as a priority. Instead, the Citizens' party Andalusian electoral agenda focused primarily on the economy of the region and criticism of PSOE's last 36 years of governance.¹⁷⁴ The AA party's electoral program called for broader support for immigrants by improving integration and housing programs. It also proposed providing higher support to the non-government organizations (NGOs) that rescue migrants in the Mediterranean by rejecting the laws that incriminate them.¹⁷⁵

2. Vox on Immigration

As the mainstream parties' position on immigration failed to articulate policies to respond to the growing concern of voters, Vox voiced its anti-immigration opinions and proposed radical solutions to the issue. Vox's Andalusian regional president, Francisco Serrano, commonly referred to immigrants as invaders, which in his opinion were coming to replace Spaniards.¹⁷⁶ Serrano's "invasion" comment coincided with the assault on the enclave of Melilla, one of two Spanish autonomous cities located in northern Africa, in which 300 migrants violently attempted to gain entry to the enclave in October 2018.¹⁷⁷ The attack on Melilla resulted in the death of one immigrant and the injury of 19 others. Additionally, Six Spanish guards also received minor injuries during the assault. Out of the approximately 300 immigrants that coordinated the assault on the enclave, 200 of them managed to force their entry into Spanish territory.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ "PP's 2018 Andalucía's Electoral Program," PP Andaluz, 288, November 2018, <https://ppandaluz.es/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ppandaluz2018-programa-COMPLETO-W.pdf>.

¹⁷⁴ "Nuestras Propuestas" Andalucía, accessed September 13, 2019, <http://andalucia.ciudadanos-cs.org/nuestras-propuestas/>.

¹⁷⁵ "2018 Electoral Programs," Adelante Andalucía, 216, accessed September 13, 2019, https://adelanteandalucia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/programa_gobierno.pdf.

¹⁷⁶ Carvajal.

¹⁷⁷ Paqui Sanchez, "Un Inmigrante Muerto y 19 Heridos En un Salto Masivo a la Valla de Melilla," *El Mundo*, October 21, 2018, <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2018/10/21/5bcc4a2222601d7a268b45e7.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Sanchez.

Vox also voiced strong disagreement with the government, concerning the assistance that is provided to immigrants, and spun immigrants as others who forced their way into Spain; Vox also demanded the central government to take care of Spaniards first, before assisting outsiders. Vox attacked the mainstream parties' inability to provide solutions to the migratory problem. According to *El Mundo news*, Vox's voters felt a sense of abandonment by the social services institutions that deny Spaniards support but aid foreigners that immigrate into the country.¹⁷⁹

During the regional election campaign, Vox proposed the immediate deportation of all illegal immigrants and those who obtained legal status in Spain but have committed any criminal activity. The party recommended regulating immigration based "on the needs of our national economy and of the new arrival's ability to integrate into Spanish society and accept our values."¹⁸⁰ Vox also proposed to set quotas for immigration and provide preference to nationalities of Spanish speaking countries, who share similar cultural ties with Spain. The party adopted the slogan "We are of extreme necessity" to counter the categorization as an extreme party by its competitors.¹⁸¹ It also claimed to be of extreme necessity to build a wall around the enclaves in Northern Africa to prevent future forced entries. It is evident that immigration became a center topic for the Andalusian regional election, as the region was facing significant challenges to control the flow and to provide services to the influx of migrants. Clearly, established parties failed to provide resolution to voters' concerns over immigration, providing a vacuum for Vox to fill, becoming the party that publicly spoke of the issue and offered radical solutions to the problem.

As Mainstream parties failed to articulate policies that would provide solutions to citizens' immigration centered concerns. Vox used this political opportunity and addressed the immigration issue and filled the void left by mainstream political parties. At a regional level, an Andalusian post-electoral survey conducted by *El País* news reported that 41.6

¹⁷⁹ Carvajal.

¹⁸⁰ Jorge Rodriguez, "Far Right in Spain: Far-Right Spanish Political Party Vox: What Are Its Policies?," *El País*, December 12, 2018, https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/12/03/inenglish/1543832942_674971.html.

¹⁸¹ Carvajal.

percent of respondents voted for Vox due to the party's immigration discourse.¹⁸² The survey further supports that Vox benefited from the immigration issue by making it a center topic during its campaign.

F. CONCLUSION

As Radical right-wing parties experienced a high level of electoral success across Europe using anti-immigration rhetoric, Spain remained an exemption to the radical right from 1979 until the rise of Vox in 2018. Spain has experienced immigration from northern Africa since the 1980s but was able to control the migratory flow due to agreements with Morocco. However, due to an agricultural disagreement with the EU, Morocco allowed immigrants to depart its coasts toward Spain in 2017,¹⁸³ which consequently created an unmanageable wave of immigrants' arrivals in Spain by 2018. Beginning in June 2018, Spain experienced a surge of immigrants that created challenges for the region of Andalusia, which ultimately requested assistance from Madrid and the EU to deal with the uncontrolled flow of migrants. These challenges were heavily covered and reported by the media, consequently increasing citizens' concern over the uncontrolled flow of immigration. Mainstream parties failed to address the citizens' immigration concerns and created the political opportunity for Vox to step in and own the immigration issue, which garnered Vox enough political support to enter the Andalusian parliament.

Vox managed to win 11 percent of total votes in the 2018 Andalusian regional election. Comparatively, Vox had participated in the March 2015 Andalusian election, in which it did not use anti-immigration rhetoric and received less than one percent of the total votes.¹⁸⁴ An examination of the number of immigrant arrivals via the Mediterranean revealed that immigration was not an issue during the 2015 Andalusian election because Spain received less than 6,000 illegal immigrants via the Mediterranean in 2014 and 2015.

¹⁸² "Estudios para *El País*," 40dB, accessed December 16, 2019, <https://40db.es/actividad/estudios-para-el-pais/>.

¹⁸³ Ana Garcia Valdivia, "The Externalization of European Borders: Morocco Becomes a Key EU Partner In Migration Control," *Forbes*, December 26, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/anagarciavaldivia/2018/12/26/the-externalization-of-european-borders-morocco-becomes-a-key-partner-for-the-eu/>.

¹⁸⁴ Resultados Provisionales—Andalucía.

However, immigration became a leading issue for the 2018 Andalusian election as Spain received nearly 60,000 immigrants that year alone. The breakthrough of Vox in the mainstream political sphere coincided with the increase of immigration and citizens' concern over the influx of migrants.

Using the single issue and the political opportunity structure theses, this chapter examined the increase of illegal immigration via the Strait of Gibraltar in Spain, the issues related to its increase, and determined that it was the failure of mainstream parties to address the immigration concerns of the electorate that contributed to the breakthrough of the radical right-wing party Vox in the 2018 Andalusian regional election. As mainstream parties failed to communicate distinctive policy alternatives that addressed the concerns of the electorate in Spain, Vox persisted with its anti-immigrant rhetoric by proposing drastic solutions to the issue and addressed the voters' growing immigration concerns and consequently obtained its first electoral victory since its inception in 2013.

IV. THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY OF CATALAN SEPARATISM

Catalonia's separatist movements have created significant unrest and violence in the Spanish socio-political realm in recent years. Although the 1978 Spanish Constitution restored regional autonomy after nearly 40 years of suppression under a fascist ruler, Catalonia continued to advocate for greater autonomy from the Spanish government. Since 2014 it has attempted to pass unconstitutional referendums to secede from Spain. These unconstitutional referenda have brought a wave of violent protests to the streets of Catalonia that became a leading issue during the two national elections held in 2019, which saw the political party Vox ascend from zero representation in the Congress of deputies to become the third-largest national party in Spain. The national government under both mainstream parties, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the center-right, People's Party (PP), have been unable or unwilling to control the Catalan separatist movements and in turn provided Vox the political opportunity to present itself as an alternative party that is willing to resolve the Catalan regional crisis.

This chapter considers Catalonia's separatist movement and the mainstream parties' failure to solve the Catalan separatist issue as reasons for Vox's ascendance into the national parliament. Spanish Mainstream parties have a history of providing concessions and negotiating with Catalan secessionists parties, but Vox has since its formation advocated for the unchallenged unity of Spain, continuous opposition to separatist movements and the prohibition of regional separatist parties. Applying the political opportunity structure thesis, which holds that the "actions and programmes of mainstream parties help or hinder" emerging parties,¹⁸⁵ this chapter finds that the sudden support for the radical right-wing party Vox can be partially attributed to the Catalan separatist movement and citizens' loss of confidence of mainstream parties' ability to contain Catalonia's separatist efforts.

¹⁸⁵ Eatwell, 58.

A. SPAIN'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM AS A POLITICAL TOOL

The leaders of the Catalan separatist parties have been pushing the limits of the constitution since 1993 by using the Spanish electoral system to their advantage to reform the Constitutional statute of autonomy and to gain broader regional concessions from the central government. More recently, the Catalan regional parliament attempted to pass unconstitutional referendums to secede from Spain, an act that has brought considerable challenges to the Spanish central government. The Spanish central government under the Socialist and the conservative Popular Party have been unsuccessful in containing the Catalan separatist drive, which has recently created the worst political crisis since Spain returned to democracy.

1. Regional Autonomy under the 1978 Spanish Constitution

After four decades under a fascist dictatorship that imposed a centralized state and mandated a cultural homogenous nation, Spain transitioned to democracy and restored a path to regional autonomy in the 1978 Spanish constitution. However, autonomy does not translate into regional independence, as the constitution specifically addresses. Article two of the constitution states that “the constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation” and that it “recognizes and guarantees the right to autonomy.”¹⁸⁶ The current Spanish constitution created a semi-federal structure that shares the powers of the state with seventeen autonomous communities—each with its own parliament, president and high court of justice.¹⁸⁷ Of the 17 regions, Catalonia, Basque Country, and Galicia were given a speedy preferential way to obtain autonomy due to their previous autonomy status held during the Second Republic. The first regions to attain autonomy under the new constitution were the Basque Country and Catalonia, both obtaining full autonomy on 18 December 1979, while the rest of the communities had to undergo a five year period of

¹⁸⁶ “Constitución Española,” Senado de España, accessed January 22, 2020, <http://www.senado.es/web/conocersenado/normas/constitucion/index.html>.

¹⁸⁷ Michael T. Newton, *Institutions of Modern Spain: a Political and Economic Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 117.

“limited autonomy” before transitioning to full autonomous regions.¹⁸⁸ After following the prescribed constitutional procedures, the communities of Madrid and Castilla y Leon were the last to be granted limited autonomy on 25 February 1983.¹⁸⁹

Although the 1978 Spanish constitution provided all seventeen regions a great degree of autonomy to run their own regional governments, the constitution also ensured that the regions acted within the central constitutional framework. Each region enjoys a high level of political independence that includes statutory, legislative and financial autonomy that provide sufficient powers to each regional government to govern independently of Madrid as long as they remain within the constitutional framework. However, article 153a of the constitution states that the Constitutional Court has the final say in the adjudication of the constitutionality of any regional legislation.¹⁹⁰

If autonomous regions fail to adhere to the decision of the Constitutional Court, article 155 of the constitution can be applied. Article 155 states that if a region with autonomy fails to respect the constitutional mandates, or “act in a way” that could jeopardize the “general interests of Spain”, the government, with the support of the senate, can take any measures necessary to force any region to comply with its obligations or to prevent it from carrying out further unconstitutional activities.¹⁹¹ To a lesser degree, the constitution also provides article 116, which allows the government to impose, with the support of congress, “a state of alarm” and impose martial law up to 15 days to regain control of any specific unconstitutional issue.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Montserrat Guibernau, “Prospects for an Independent Catalonia,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 27, no. 1 (2014): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-013-9165-4>.

¹⁸⁹ Newton, 119.

¹⁹⁰ Newton, 141.

¹⁹¹ Newton, 141.

¹⁹² “Título V. de Las Relaciones Entre el Gobierno y Las Cortes Generales,” *Constitución Española*, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://app.congreso.es/consti/constitucion/indice/titulos/articulos.jsp?ini=108&fin=116&tipo=2>.

2. Spain's Electoral System

Due to Spain's electoral system, nationalist parties have been able to negotiate for greater concessions in exchange for national parliamentary support. Spain uses a parliamentary system, in which the monarch is the head of state, while the prime minister, also called the president, is the head of government. Elections in this system can create a single winner that can lead as a single-party government if it controls an absolute majority of seats (176 of 350) in the congress of deputies.¹⁹³ Having the majority of seats allows single-party governments to pass laws and make policy without the support of other parties. Starting with the first post-Franco democratic election held in 1979, PSOE consistently won a majority of parliamentary seats in elections and had been able to form single-party governments and pass regulations without the support of other parties.¹⁹⁴ This came to an end in the 1993 general election, in which the PSOE won the most parliamentary seats, but lacked a majority to form a single-party government, and was forced to seek support from other parties to form a minority government. The result of the 1993 election provided regional separatist parties the ability to negotiate for greater regional concessions with the central government in exchange for parliamentary support.¹⁹⁵

B. THE CATALAN CRISIS IN THE MAKING

Catalan separatist parties have, since the 1993 general election, aimed to provide national parliamentary support to PSOE and the PP to obtain greater regional autonomy. In exchange for nationalists' parties political support, the PSOE and PP slowly conceded greater autonomy to the Catalan region. In the 1993 general election, PSOE won 159 of the 350 congressional seats, falling short of the 176 required seats to form a government.¹⁹⁶ The election results forced PSOE to request parliamentary support from the nationalist parties of Catalonia and Basque Country to remain in power. The Catalan nationalist party, Convergence and Union (CiU), led by its regional president, Jordi Pujol, provided its 17

¹⁹³ Newton, 45–54.

¹⁹⁴ Newton, 7.

¹⁹⁵ Newton, 217.

¹⁹⁶ Newton, 217.

seats to PSOE to form a government, while the Basque nationalist party (PNV) provided its five seats.¹⁹⁷ Not surprisingly, Jordi Pujol used CiU's position to gain concessions for Catalonia, such as the retention of a greater share of personal income tax generated in the region.¹⁹⁸

The center-right Popular Party won its first general election in 1996, but also faced an inconclusive victory that led the party to negotiate with regional nationalist parties to form a minority government. The leader of the PNV, Xabier Arzallus, in exchange for its support in parliament, requested greater concessions for the region.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, the Catalan president agreed to support the incoming national party in exchange for important compromises from the new Conservative government of Jose M. Aznar, who largely depended on the votes of the CiU to govern.²⁰⁰ Prime minister Aznar, in order to receive parliamentary support for his policies, was forced to make significant concessions to the Basques and, especially the Catalan nationalist parties. These concessions included important topics such as the financing of regional government activities and, tacitly, the "balance of power and authority between the central government and regional levels of government."²⁰¹

The Catalan nationalist parties lost their negotiating position from 2000 to 2004, while the Popular Party led Spain with an absolute parliamentary majority, and no longer needed their support. However, the separatist parties were once again needed by the PSOE in the following election.²⁰² The PP won 183 seats in the congress of deputies in the 2000 general election, allowing the formation of a single-party government without the support

¹⁹⁷ Newton, 217.

¹⁹⁸ Newton, 9.

¹⁹⁹ Newton, 209.

²⁰⁰ Newton, 211.

²⁰¹ Richard Gunther, Joan Botella, and Jose Ramon Montero, *Democracy in Modern Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 119.

²⁰² Michael Keating and Alex Wilson, "Renegotiating the State of Autonomies: Statute Reform and Multi-Level Politics in Spain," *West European Politics* 32, no. 3 (2009): 540, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380902779089>.

of any other political party.²⁰³ However, the PSOE won the 2004 general election by obtaining 164 seats, but once again fell short of the absolute majority to form a government. The Catalan and Basques nationalist parties found themselves once again wooed by PSOE for their support. The pro-independence Catalan party, Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), along with other regional nationalist parties provided PSOE the parliamentary support required to form a minority government.²⁰⁴ In exchange, PSOE's leader, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, promised to open dialogue with all autonomous communities to reduce the use of the constitutional court for the resolution of issues between the central and regional governments.²⁰⁵ It was the government of PSOE, under Zapatero, that opened Catalonia's separatism floodgates when he promised in November 2003 to "support any reform of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy approved by the Catalan Parliament."²⁰⁶

Zapatero's promises came to fruition when his government supported Catalonia's 2005 statute of autonomy reform, which requested to place the Catalan language above Spanish and the recognition of Catalonia as a nation. After the Catalan statute faced opposition from the conservative right, Zapatero agreed to allow the Catalan government to recognize Catalonia as a nation, whereas the central government would recognize Catalonia's "national reality as a nationality" as required by the constitution.²⁰⁷ After negotiations between Zapatero and CiU's new leader, Artur Mas, the Catalan nationalist, secured PSOE's support and the statute became law in August 2006.²⁰⁸ This was yet

²⁰³ "El PP Saca 2,4 Millones de Votos de Ventaja a un PSOE en Fuerte Retroceso," *El País*, March 13, 2000, https://elpais.com/diario/2000/03/13/espana/952902015_850215.html.

²⁰⁴ "Zapatero, Investido Presidente Del Gobierno con Mayoría Absoluta, ABC, April 16, 2004, https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-zapatero-investido-presidente-gobierno-mayoria-absoluta-200404160300-962990422349_noticia.html.

²⁰⁵ Abc.

²⁰⁶ Xavier Vilà Carrera, "The Domain of Spain: How Likely Is Catalan Independence?," *World Affairs* 176, no. 5 (2014): 77, www.jstor.org/stable/43555055.

²⁰⁷ Bonnie N. Field, "A 'Second Transition' in Spain? Policy, Institutions and Interparty Politics under Zapatero (2004-8)," *South European Society and Politics* 14, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 390, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608740903503803>.

²⁰⁸ Carrera, 80.

another victory for the Catalan's leaders use of "pactism"—the use of resistance and negotiation to obtain concessions from Madrid.²⁰⁹

The PP, however, opposed the Catalan statute reform and appealed to the Constitutional Court. After almost four years of deliberation, the Constitutional Court overturned several of Catalonia's articles, including the recognition of Catalonia as a nation and Catalan as a primary language.²¹⁰ The court's ruling "was a tipping point among Catalans" that led to massive demonstrations drawing over a million people to rally for greater autonomy, waving flags and banners that read, "We are a nation. We decide."²¹¹ The annulment of the Catalan autonomy reform, which had been implemented and enjoyed in Catalonia for four years (2006–2010), set in motion a more determined and aggressive Catalan separatist movement—A movement that put aside the go-along and get-along tactics of pactism that had until now defined the relationship between Barcelona and Madrid, and no longer wanted to abide by the constitutional framework to reach self-determination.²¹² PSOE opened Catalonia's separatist movements, which slowly demanded more autonomy and when those demands were denied, separatists began to challenge the unity of Spain by aiming to secede. It became apparent that the growing Catalan separatist movement would require a strong governmental response from Madrid to prevent a political crisis, and it fell up to the PP to quell the separatist movements. However, the PP took a series of actions that only exacerbated the separatist movements by introducing violence to an already unstable situation.

C. POPULAR PARTY'S FAILURE AGAINST CATALAN SEPARATISM

The government of PP, under the leadership of Mariano Rajoy, who led Spain from 2011 to 2018, witnessed the intensifying determination of the Catalan Separatist movement but failed to act decisively to prevent Catalonia's determination to secede from Spain. The

²⁰⁹ Carrera, 80.

²¹⁰ Carrera, 80.

²¹¹ "More than 1 Million Protest Court Ruling in Barcelona," CNN, July 11, 2020, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/07/11/spain.protests/index.html>.

²¹² Carrera, 81.

PP in an attempt to control the Catalan separatists' efforts, instead, escalated the situation into violence, and its inability to quell the Catalan challenge made the party appear weak in Spain. The Popular Party, after winning the 2011 general election by obtaining 186 parliamentary seats,²¹³ opposed further decentralization of Spain and rejected Catalonia's attempts to gain concessions, including a bid by Artur Mas to obtain a fiscal pact.²¹⁴ After multiple failed attempts to gain regional concessions, the Catalan Premier announced, in a press conference held in December 2013, that Catalonia would hold a non-binding referendum to determine its citizens' support for Catalonia's independence movement.²¹⁵ PP's government tried to block the referendum by referring it to the constitutional court, which ruled the referendum unconstitutional.²¹⁶ However, all attempts by Rajoy, including open dialogue with the Catalan leader, failed to prevent the Catalan independence vote from moving forward.²¹⁷

The 2014 Catalan Independence non-binding referendum took place unimpeded and in defiance of the constitutional court, and its results confirmed to the Catalan society that the national government could be contradicted without consequences. The central government ordered Catalonia's regional government to stop the voting process, and although there were suspicions among voters that Rajoy might send the Civil Guard troops to block the polling stations, 2.5 million people cast their votes without interruption.²¹⁸ The vote was a success for the separatist parties as 81 percent of voters supported the pursuit of a binding independence referendum. The non-binding referendum asked two

²¹³ Carlos E. Cué, "España Entrega al PP Todo el Poder," *El País*, November 21, 2011, http://elpais.com/politica/2011/11/21/actualidad/1321832133_971045.html.

²¹⁴ William Chislett, "Forty Years of Democratic Spain" (working paper, Elcano Royal Institute, 2018), 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org>.

²¹⁵ Miquel Noguer, "¿Quiere que Cataluña Sea un Estado? y ¿Que Sea un Estado Independiente?," *El País*, December 12, 2013, https://elpais.com/ccaa/2013/12/12/catalunya/1386848019_314345.html.

²¹⁶ Ashifa Kassam, "Catalonia Independence Referendum Halted by Spain's Constitutional Court," *Guardian*, September 29, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/catalonia-independence-referendum-spain-court-vote>.

²¹⁷ "Catalonia to Defy Court With Independence Straw Poll," *New York Times*, May 11, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/05/world/europe/defying-court-ruling-catalonia-to-press-ahead-with-independence-straw-poll.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article®ion=Footer>.

²¹⁸ Frayer.

questions: “Do you want Catalonia to be a State?” If so, “Do you want that state to be independent?”²¹⁹ Although the referendum was non-binding, the fact that it was allowed to be held against the government’s order, demonstrated the central government’s difficulty in exercising its authority in the Catalan region, which made the central government appear soft throughout Spain. Prime minister Rajoy came under heavy criticism from his supporters for not preventing the vote in Catalonia.

The then newly formed party Vox accused Rajoy of dereliction of duty for failing to prevent the vote. Vox also suggested for separatist parties to be banned from holding public office. Even one of Rajoy’s Army Chiefs of Staff called the “central power weak” against the Catalan separatist movement.²²⁰ Other opponents of the independence referendum warned that this vote would prompt more independence demands from the separatist forces.

The Catalan separatist parties emboldened by the success of the 2014 referendum continued to defy the PP’s government and the constitutional court. In November 2015, the Catalan parliament approved a declaration of sovereignty and the right to decide on their independence, but the constitutional court annulled the declaration.²²¹ In January 2016, Catalonia elected a new Premier, Carles Puigdemont, who promised to pursue a legally binding referendum on independence. Puigdemont kept his promise and in September 2016, announced a legally binding independence referendum to be held in September 2017, with or without the central government’s permission.²²² According to Chislett, the constitutional court, once again found the referendum unconstitutional and ordered the Catalan separatist parties not to hold the independence referendum.²²³ Rajoy publicly promised to block the referendum from taking place and stated that he would do

²¹⁹ Frayer.

²²⁰ Matt Moffett, “Spain Files Criminal Charges Over Catalonia Independence Vote,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 21, 2014, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/spain-files-criminal-charges-over-catalonia-independence-vote-1416586514>.

²²¹ Chislett, 28.

²²² Chislett, 28.

²²³ Chislett, 28.

“whatever was needed to prevent it.”²²⁴ However, in September 2017, the Catalan parliament ignored the constitutional court’s ruling and the central government’s threats and took its independence bid a step further by formally calling a referendum vote on the secession from Spain to be held on 01 October 2017.²²⁵

Prime minister Rajoy attempted to prevent the referendum vote from taking place by force, but once again failed to keep his promise, which made his party, once again, seem incompetent against the Catalan challenge. A few weeks before the vote, the central government sent the National police and the Civil Guard to seize ballot boxes and close down voting stations, but all efforts failed to discourage Puigdemont from calling off the vote. Instead, Rajoy’s efforts to prevent the vote resulted in clashes between voters and the police, which resulted in 776 voters in need of emergency medical treatment.²²⁶ Images of Spanish police forces in riot gear forcing their way through unarmed crowds of voters circled the world, further drawing attention to the Catalan crisis. Even with the police actions to prevent the vote, 2.3 million people managed to cast a vote, with 2 million voting to secede from Spain.²²⁷ The Catalan Premier declared, after the vote, that Catalans had “earned the right to be an independent state” and declared independence on 27 October, which deepened the Catalan crisis.²²⁸

Prime minister Rajoy responded by invoking article 155 of the constitution to take direct rule of the Catalan region and called for a new regional election—hoping for a more conservative regional government. Imposing direct rule of Catalonia prompted its premier, Carles Puigdemont, to flee the country to avoid arrest, but ten of his ministers, including

²²⁴ Diego Torres, “Mariano Rajoy on Catalonia: ‘There Won’t Be a Referendum,’” Politico, September 7, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/mariano-rajoy-on-catalonia-there-wont-be-a-referendum/>.

²²⁵ Chislett, 28.

²²⁶ Diego Torres, “Catalan Crisis Deepens after Day of Violence,” Politico, October 1, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/spanish-riot-police-try-to-stop-catalan-independence-vote/>.

²²⁷ Chislett, 28.

²²⁸ Camila Domonoske, “Catalonia Declares Independence; Spain Approves Central Takeover Of Region,” NPR, October 27, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/10/27/560357561/spains-prime-minister-asks-for-direct-rule-authority-over-catalonia>.

the vice-president, Oriol Junqueras, were arrested and jailed by the central government.²²⁹ The Catalan regional elections were held on 21 December, which saw another pro-independence leader, Quinn Torra, sworn into office, who continues to push the secessionist agenda at the time of this writing.²³⁰ Ultimately, the PP's attempt to control the Catalan separatists only increased tensions between the central and Catalan region governments and added violence to the mix. Some PP supporters blame the Catalan crisis on Rajoy for waiting too long to apply article 155 to control separatism.²³¹

In addition to the failure with the Catalan challenge, the PP also faced corruption accusations since 2017 that further decreased its credibility and resulted in a no-confidence vote that placed the PSOE back in power in June 2018.²³² A national poll published by *El Espanol* news reported in May 2018 that the PP's national support had decreased substantially and that it would receive only half of the votes received in the previous national election.²³³ In June 2018, PSOE filed for a motion of no-confidence following a court ruling over a corruption case that involved senior officials of the Popular Party. PSOE once again used separatist parties' support and was able to pass the motion with a majority due to the support of two Catalan pro-independence parties, Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) and Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT), along with the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV).²³⁴ Vox's leader, Santiago Abascal, quickly condemned the motion and stated that Spain had transitioned from a "government of abandonment of functions" (with respect to the unity of Spain) "to a government of treason" (given PSOE's

²²⁹ Camila Domonoske, "4 Separatist Catalan Leaders To Remain In Jail, 6 Others Out On Bail," NPR, December 4, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/04/568307145/4-separatist-catalan-leaders-to-remain-in-jail-6-others-out-on-bail>.

²³⁰ Simon Hunter, "Quim Torra Is Elected New Catalan Premier," *El País*, May 14, 2018, https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/05/12/inenglish/1526134019_466014.html.

²³¹ Jones, "Far Right Breakthrough in Andalucía Send Shockwave through Spanish Politics."

²³² Diego Torres, "Spain's Rajoy Ousted in No-Confidence Vote," *Politico*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/spains-rajoy-ousted-in-no-confidence-vote/>.

²³³ Ana Gracia, "El PP Se Desmorona y Cae Hasta el 16,8% y 63 Escaños En la Primera Encuesta Tras la Sentencia de Gürtel," *El Español*, May 27, 2018, https://www.elespanol.com/espana/20180527/pp-desmorona-espanol-publicara-edicion-sentencia-gurtel/310469266_0.html.

²³⁴ Torres, "Spain's Rajoy Ousted in No-Confidence Vote."

history of concessions to separatist parties).²³⁵ Abascal once again called for the illegalization of separatist parties that in his view “carried out a coup d’état” against Spain.²³⁶ With the center-right Popular Party’s decreased popularity, the Catalan challenge was left to the new government of PSOE. However, the government of PSOE, immediately after assuming control of the government, began to provide concessions to the separatist parties—concessions that would further erode PSOE’s credibility with the population.

D. PSOE’S CONCESSIONS TO SEPARATIST PARTIES

Less than a week after assuming the role as Prime minister of Spain, PSOE’s leader, Pedro Sanchez, began providing concessions to the Catalan separatist parties. Sanchez lifted the central government’s supervision over Catalonia’s finances, a measure put in place in 2015 to ensure that the Catalan parliament would not use government funds to sponsor the independence drive in the region.²³⁷ Sanchez’s actions brought considerable criticism from other parties and corroborated Vox’s claim that separatists were once again using “pactism” to gain concessions. The government of PSOE started to be regarded as too soft on Catalan separatism, which would eventually place the unity of Spain at risk. Only a month after Sanchez became prime minister, a poll conducted by *El Mundo News*, found that 45 percent of the respondents believed that Sanchez would endanger the unity of Spain by providing greater concessions to the Catalan separatists.²³⁸ The growing citizens’ dissatisfaction with PSOE’s position on the Catalan challenge allowed Vox to present itself as a fierce defender of Spain to gain electoral support.

As the government of PSOE continued to provide concessions to secessionist parties to retain their parliamentary support, actions that further decreased the Socialist party’s credibility to defend the unity of Spain, Vox continued to gain momentum. In July

²³⁵ Toni Albir, “Barcelona: Vox Pide Ilegalizar a Partidos Independentistas,” *la Vanguardia*, June 3, 2018, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20180603/444048797659/vox-ilegalizar-partidos-independentistas-barcelona.html>.

²³⁶ Albir.

²³⁷ Susana Urrea, “Madrid Lifts Spending Controls on Catalonia Region,” *El País*, June 8, 2018, https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/06/08/inenglish/1528471460_672480.html.

²³⁸ “La Mayoría ve a Pedro Sánchez ‘Muy Blando’ con los Separatistas,” *El Mundo*, July 13, 2018, <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2018/07/14/5b490aea22601d257a8b4647.html>.

2018, Sanchez provided a series of concessions to Catalan separatists that included the reopening of a dozen Catalan embassies, which were closed during the application of article 155 and were known for promoting the independence of Catalonia internationally. Also in July, Sanchez agreed to transfer the Catalan officials held in jail for the illegal 2017 Catalan referendum to Catalan controlled jails, a move that was viewed as a sign of weakness against separatism.²³⁹ In September of the same year, Sanchez hinted toward the possibility of providing pardons to the Catalan prisoners jailed for the illegal 2017 referendum.²⁴⁰ During the same month, one million Catalan separatist supporters staged a protest to renew their call for independence and to demand the release of the jailed political leaders.²⁴¹ Vox continued to use PSOE's weak stance against separatism to tap into Spanish nationalism by citing the PSOE's soft approach to separatists as a risk to the unity of Spain. By October 2018, polls conducted by the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS), listed Vox in the polls by its name, no longer being included among the "others" category, and CIS's survey results also estimated that Vox would receive 1.4 percent of the votes in a national election, a significant increase from the 0.2 percent it received in the 2016 general election.²⁴²

E. VOX'S FIRST CATALAN POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY

The Popular Party's failure against Catalan independence referendums and the PSOE's compromising actions regarding Catalonia separatism provided Vox the political opportunity to present itself as the best alternative option to deal with Catalonia separatist

²³⁹ Christian Campos, "The Thirteen Assignments of Pedro Sánchez to Catalan Separatism," March 31, 2019, https://www.elespanol.com/opinion/tribunas/20190331/trece-cesiones-pedro-sanchez-separatismo-catalan/387331271_12.html.

²⁴⁰ Sergi Quintia, "Sánchez Esquiva la 'Hipótesis' de los Indultos," *la Vanguardia*, September 23, 2018, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20180923/451991094225/pedro-sanchez-justin-trudeau-canada-crisis-catalana-empatia-indultos.html>.

²⁴¹ Stephen Burgen and Sam Jones, "A Million Attend Rally in Barcelona to Call for Catalan Independence," *Guardian*, September 11, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/11/catalans-renew-calls-independence-rally-barcelona>.

²⁴² Antonio Valdivia, "La Extrema Derecha Ya Está Aquí: ¿Hasta Dónde Puede Llegar VOX?," *Huffington Post*, October 7, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.es/2018/10/07/la-extrema-derecha-ya-esta-aqui-hasta-donde-puede-llegar-vox_a_23552333/.

movements. Vox positioned itself extremely anti-secessionist, and it berated the Socialist government for making pacts with separatists in exchange for parliamentary support.

The increase of support for Vox became apparent as the party began to gather larger crowds at rallies and after it obtained its first regional election victory. In October 2018, Vox managed to attract 9,000 people to a rally held in Madrid's Vistalegre Palace, the biggest show of support since its inception in 2013, in which its leaders strongly opposed Catalan independence.²⁴³ That same month, Vox was regarded as a risk to the center-right party of PP, as its leader, Pablo Casado, warned that supporting Vox could jeopardize the support for his party and that it could push politics further to the right.²⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the PP did not hesitate to make a pact with Vox to form a government in the region of Andalusia in December of the same year, in which Vox, for the first time, entered a regional parliament after winning 11 percent of the votes.²⁴⁵ Taking part in the formation of the coalition government helped Vox continue its ascendance into the national government. According to Tjitske Akkerman, Sarah L. de Lange, and Matthijs Rooduijn, radical right-wing parties that participate in government coalitions often experience growth of electoral support.²⁴⁶ The PP and the center-right party Citizens legitimized the emergence of Vox by including the party in the formation of a regional coalition government in Andalusia, and in turn, normalized the presence of a radical right-wing party in the mainstream political spotlight that helped Vox succeed in the national elections.

Vox's ascendance into the national government came after Sanchez failed to retain the separatist parties' parliamentary support that ultimately led to a snap election. The Catalan independence drive and the concessions provided by PSOE once again allowed

²⁴³ Constanza Lambertucci, "Far-Right Political Party Vox Attracts 9,000 People to Madrid Rally," *El País*, October 8, 2018, https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/10/08/inenglish/1538983913_173766.html.

²⁴⁴ Àngels Piñol, "Casado Advierte Del Riesgo de que el Voto a Vox Acabe Dispersando el Apoyo a la Derecha," *El País* October 8, 2018, https://elpais.com/ccaa/2018/10/08/catalunya/1538987830_720555.html.

²⁴⁵ Natalia Junquera and Javier Martín-Arroyo, "El PP Se Declara Eufórico y Dispuesto a Pactar con Vox," *El País*, December 3, 2018, https://elpais.com/politica/2018/12/02/actualidad/1543762177_290615.html.

²⁴⁶ Tjitske Akkerman, Sarah L. de Lange, and Matthijs Rooduijn, eds., *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* (Oxon: Routledge), 5.

Vox to assume center stage to defend the unity of Spain. In February 2019, prime minister Sanchez attempted to appease the Catalan separatists by conceding to their demand to allow an independent “rapporteur” to be present in future discussions between the central and Catalan government.²⁴⁷ This concession was provided in an attempt to retain their support to pass the 2019 national budget. In response, the PP, Citizens, and Vox called on their supporters to protest in Madrid against Sanchez and drew a crowd of 42,000 people demanding a general election.²⁴⁸ A few days after the protests against Sanchez took place, the parliament rejected the prime minister’s budget proposal for 2019, as the Catalan and Basque separatists, who supported the no-confidence vote against the PP leader, voted against the plan because the central government refused to discuss Catalonia’s right to self-determination.²⁴⁹ The budget’s rejection prompted Sanchez to call for a snap election to be held in April, as the government of PSOE lacked a majority in the parliament to pass any laws. Even before the national campaigns had begun, Vox had enough popularity in the country that an average of polls published by El País predicted that Vox would receive up to 10 percent of the votes in a national election.²⁵⁰

The April 2019 election witnessed the three parties on the right compete to demonstrate who could be toughest on the Catalan secessionists, while the left-wing parties continued to promote dialogue to solve the Catalan crisis. However, in the end, the PP became the biggest loser and Vox the biggest winner. All right-wing parties had one thing in common—they all accused the government of Pedro Sanchez of failing to defend the unity of Spain against Catalan separatism.²⁵¹ All right-wing leaders also made the Catalan

²⁴⁷ Diego Torres, “Sánchez Faces Backlash over Catalan Concession,” Politico, February 7, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/spain-pedro-sanchez-faces-backlash-over-catalan-secessionists-concession/>.

²⁴⁸ “Manifestación de Madrid En Directo: «Exigimos la Convocatoria Inmediata de Elecciones Generales, ABC, February 10, 2019, https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-directo-sociedad-civil-clama-unidad-espana-201902100952_directo.html.

²⁴⁹ “Spain Teeters on Brink of Snap Election,” BBC News, February 13, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47225867>.

²⁵⁰ Diego Torres, “Spain’s Sánchez Calls Snap Election on April 28,” Politico, February 15, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/spains-sanchez-calls-snap-election-on-april-28/>.

²⁵¹ David Gardner, “Spain’s Open Election Highlights Its Polarisation Problem,” Financial Times, April 21, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/819e8bf2-60fc-11e9-a27a-fdd51850994c>.

Crisis a focal point in their electoral campaigns. The leader of the Citizens party, Albert Rivera, during the campaign, proposed to invoke article 155 of the constitution to force separatists to respect the law of the constitution.²⁵² Pablo Casado, of the Popular Party, promised to gain the constitutional legality in Catalonia but did not specify how this would be done.²⁵³ Vox maintained its previous hard-liner approach to the Catalan Crisis by recommending the immediate suspension of the Catalan autonomy and the illegalization of all secessionist political parties in the country. Vox also proposed the immediate arrest of all political members that participated in the 2017 independence referendum.²⁵⁴ PSOE and far-left Podemos did not list the Catalan crisis as a priority and focused their electoral program to address economic and unemployment rate solutions.²⁵⁵ However, the leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, affirmed during a campaign in Barcelona that “the dialogue, and not the force of the judges, is the only solution to the Catalan conflict.”²⁵⁶

The results of the April 2019 Spanish general election witnessed the rise of Vox into the national parliament, effectively ending the Spanish exception to radical right-wing parties at a national level. Out of the three right-wing parties, the PP was the only party to lose votes. Vox increased its support by 10 percent from the 2016 general election, the Citizens Party increased its votes by almost three percent, while the PP decreased its votes by 16 percent. Table 5 shows the trend lines of PP and Vox, and it illustrates that Vox’s voters came from the Popular Party’s electorate. Given the Popular Party’s recent failure with the

²⁵² “Este el Programa Electoral de Ciudadanos para las Elecciones Generales del 2019,” El Confidencial, April 27, 2019, https://www.elconfidencial.com/elecciones-generales/2019-04-27/programa-electoral-ciudadanos-2019_1947042/.

²⁵³ “Así es el Programa Electoral del PP para las Elecciones Generales 2019,” El Confidencial, April 27, 2019, https://www.elconfidencial.com/elecciones-generales/2019-04-27/programa-pp-propuestas-impuestos-cataluna_1930126/.

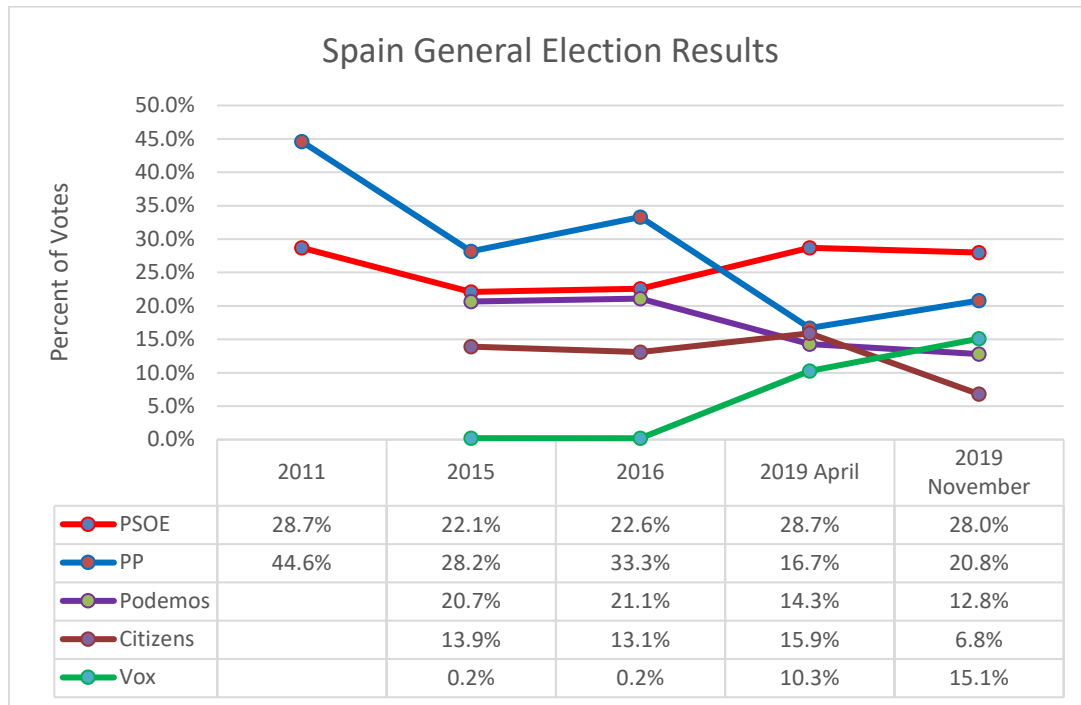
²⁵⁴ “Así es el Programa Electoral de Vox para las Elecciones Generales,” El Confidencial, April 23, 2019, https://www.elconfidencial.com/elecciones-generales/2019-04-23/programa-electoral-vox-2019_1930282/.

²⁵⁵ “Así es el Programa Electoral del PSOE para las Elecciones Generales 2019,” El Confidencial, April 27, 2019, https://www.elconfidencial.com/elecciones-generales/2019-04-27/programa-electoral-psoe-propuestas-impuestos_1932322/.

²⁵⁶ Hector Marin, “Pablo Iglesias Pide En Barcelona el Voto a los Electores Del PSC y Del Independentismo,” El Mundo, April 6, 2019, <https://www.elmundo.es/cataluna/2019/04/06/5ca89fd1fc6c83931f8b45a1.html>.

Catalan separatist movements, its involvement with corruption, which led to a change of leadership, it seems that the PP had not yet regained the support of its loyal followers, who decided to vote for Vox, a new emerging right-wing party that aggressively defended the unity of Spain.

Table 5. Spain General Election Results (2011–2019)²⁵⁷



From the left-wing parties, PSOE was the clear winner of the election by winning 28.7 percent of the votes, an increase of 6 percent from the previous election.²⁵⁸ However, the same results also revealed that the far-left party Podemos lost 7 percent of its voters but remained the fourth largest party in Spain. Although the PSOE won the election, it did not obtain the majority of votes to form a government and required the support of other smaller

²⁵⁷ “Resultados Electorales en Total España: Elecciones Generales 2011, 2015, 2016, 2019–28A, 2019” *El País*, accessed December 3, 2019, <https://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2011/generales/congreso/>.

²⁵⁸ “Resultados Electorales en Total España: Elecciones Generales 2019–28A,” *EL PAÍS*, accessed December 3, 2019, <https://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2019-28A/generales/congreso/>.

parties to form a minority government. Forming a minority government with the far-left party Podemos turned out impossible for PSOE to accomplish and ultimately led to yet another election, which provided Vox a second political opportunity to increase its rhetoric against the Catalan independence drive and increase its electoral support.

F. VOX'S SECOND CATALAN POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY

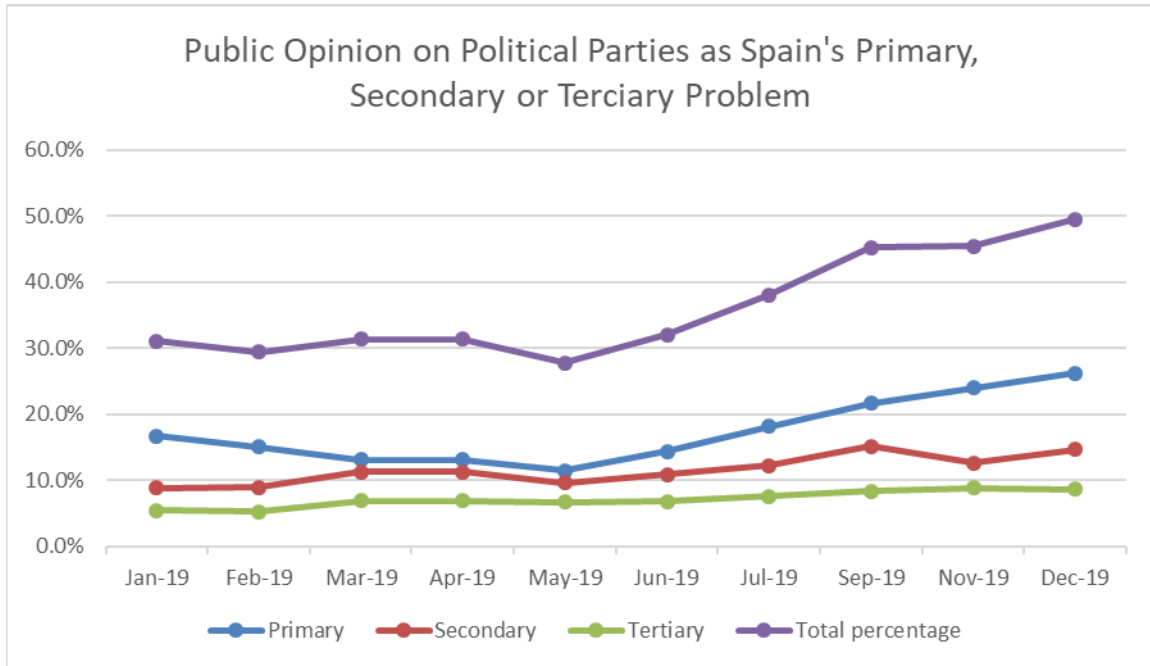
The failure of PSOE and Podemos to form a minority government further increased voters' dissatisfaction with mainstream parties while the Catalan crisis continued to intensify with violence. The April 2019 election results provided PSOE and Podemos with 165 parliamentary seats, enough to form a minority government with very little support from other parties, yet both parties failed to reach an agreement.²⁵⁹ The formation of a minority government could have put an end to the political instability that surged from the 2015 general election, which saw Spain's two-party system end when minor parties (Citizens and Podemos) received a significant share of votes that left Spain in a political deadlock.²⁶⁰ However, the two left-wing parties negotiated for six months without reaching an agreement and ultimately led Sanchez to once again call for a general election to be held in November.²⁶¹ The collapse of negotiations to form a government forced Spanish voters to take to the polls for the fourth time within four years. The political instability increased dissatisfaction with political parties as reflected in Table 6.

²⁵⁹ Sam Jones, "Spain Likely to Return to the Polls in November after Party Talks Fail," *Guardian*, September 17, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/17/spain-braces-for-another-election-as-deadline-looms>.

²⁶⁰ Raphael Minder, "Another Election in Spain Threatens to Deepen the Political Deadlock," *New York Times*, November 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/09/world/europe/spain-election.html>.

²⁶¹ Minder.

Table 6. National Political Dissatisfaction (2019)²⁶²



Beginning in May 2019, as the formation of a government appeared improbable, there was a steady growth in dissatisfaction with political parties according to surveys conducted by the CIS. In May, 27.8 percent of respondents agreed that political parties were among the three principal problems in Spain. The political dissatisfaction further increased in June to 38.1 percent, while September, a month that the formation of a minority government appeared unlikely, witnessed a record-breaking level of 45.3 percent, the highest political dissatisfaction level surveyed in Spain.²⁶³ The political dissatisfaction with political parties increased leading up to the November 2019 national election, reaching 45.5 percent in November and increased even further post-election to 49.5 percent as shown in Table 6.

²⁶² Adapted from CIS, “Barómetro.”

²⁶³ Rocio Grande, “La Preocupación por la Política Bate un Nuevo Récord y los Españoles no Creen que la Situación Mejore Pronto,” RTVE.es, September 26, 2019, <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20190926/preocupacion-politica-bate-nuevo-record-espanoles-no-creen-situacion-mejore-pronto/1980116.shtml>.

As the November national election approached, Catalonia separatists, who were jailed for the 2017 illegal referendum were finally sentenced, which triggered massive protests and the return of violence to the region. On 14 October 2019, the Spanish Supreme Court found nine former Catalan separatist leaders, including the regional ex-vice president, guilty of sedition and misuse of public funds. The regional president, Quim Torra, called for protesters to take to the streets to demand the release of the jailed politicians, but the protests ultimately resulted in violence.²⁶⁴ The sentencing unleashed mass protests that culminated with violent behavior, in which police used “tear gas and rubber bullets against protesters” who attacked riot forces with rocks and Molotov cocktails.²⁶⁵ Protestors attempted to paralyze the city of Barcelona by blocking main roads, railroads and the airport, which canceled 108 flights for safety reasons.²⁶⁶ As the violence continued without a resolution in sight, right-wing parties called on the central government of Sanchez to take action by using his executive powers to quell the instability in the region. Vox’s leader, Santiago Abascal, blamed Sanchez for the persistent violence and on October 16th, took the lead and formally filed a request in the congress of deputies to apply article 116th of the constitution to restore law and order in the city.²⁶⁷ As the violence continued to rage throughout Catalonia, Prime Minister Sanchez insisted that he would not use drastic measures to quell the ongoing disturbances and that “moderation [would] help to calm the mood.”²⁶⁸ However, the central government inactions allowed the protests to continue for weeks and only appeared incompetent in the face of the chaos that was ravaging the region while also putting the approaching national election at risk.

²⁶⁴ Raphael Minder, “Catalan Separatist Leaders Get Lengthy Prison Terms for Sedition,” *New York Times*, October 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/14/world/europe/catalonia-separatists-verdict-spain.html>.

²⁶⁵ Minder, “Another Election in Spain Threatens to Deepen the Political Deadlock.”

²⁶⁶ Dani Cordero and Alfonso L. Congostrina, “Las Protestas Independentistas Colapsan el Aeropuerto de Barcelona,” *El País*, October 14, 2019, https://elpais.com/ccaa/2019/10/14/catalunya/1571042788_418131.html.

²⁶⁷ El Independiente, “Vox Pide al Congreso Aplicar de Forma ‘Inmediata’ el Estado de Excepción,”

²⁶⁸ Luis Garcia, “Sánchez Apuesta por la ‘Moderación’ En Catalunya Porque ‘Contribuye a Calmar los Ánimos,’” *Vanguardia*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20191018/471046392716/pedro-sanchez-moderacion-cataluna-calmar-animos-sentencia-huelga-general.html>.

Catalan separatist protests continued into the election month of November as the central government refused to take tougher actions to quell the disturbances, putting at risk a free unimpeded election. In early November, although the protestors had toned down the violence, Spanish authorities began preparing for violent protests, expected to be held by Catalan independence supporters during the national election on 10 November.²⁶⁹ Right-wing political parties once again placed Catalan separatism in the center of their campaigns, all offering tough solutions to the Catalan crisis, although some of them took a lighter approach this time around. The Popular Party used a different approach from the April election by proposing the return to concord and dialogue to avoid exclusion and confrontation between governments. The Citizens party also took a lighter approach to the Catalan question and proposed in vague words, to ban political parties that are against the current constitutional framework to ensure the preservation of a democratic Spain. Vox retained its hard stance against the Catalan separatists by proposing the immediate suspension of the Catalan autonomy and the illegalization of all separatist political parties in Spain. Vox took it a step further by proposing to end the State of autonomy, and transform Spain into a “unitary State of Law” with a “single government and single parliament for all of Spain.”²⁷⁰ The PSOE promised to solve the territorial problem of Catalonia by promoting dialogue and abiding by the constitution and building a “stronger, more united and more just” Spain.²⁷¹ The leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, offered similar solutions to the Catalan crisis, by offering stronger communication between both governments, but this time its leader also offered to support a referendum mutually agreed to by the central and regional government.²⁷²

The November national election results once again revealed the political deadlock in Spain, and Vox once again emerged as the biggest winner and also as the third-largest

²⁶⁹ Belen Carreno, “Spanish Authorities Ready for Election Eve Protests: Sources,” Reuters, November 1, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-election-catalonia-idUSKBN1XB4B0>.

²⁷⁰ Sandre Muntane, “Cataluña, el Centro de Todos los Programas Electorales. ¿Qué Propuestas Tienen los Partidos?,” 20minutos, November 8, 2019, <https://www.20minutos.es/noticia/4047081/0/cataluna-centro-todos-programas-electorales-propuestas-partidos-politicos/>.

²⁷¹ Muntane.

²⁷² Muntane.

national party. Sanchez called for the general elections hoping to improve his party's electoral success and form a single-party government. However, the electoral results showed that the party received 28 percent of the votes, down almost one percent or three parliamentary seats from the April election.²⁷³ The election results also revealed that PSOE's counterpart, Podemos, actually lost almost 2 percent of votes or seven parliamentary seats, leaving a left coalition even further away from forming a minority government without the support of separatist parties. The biggest loser was the Citizens party, which lost almost 9 percent of support or 47 parliamentary seats. The PP was able to improve its electoral support by winning 20.8 percent of the votes, an increase of 4 percent from the April election.²⁷⁴ Vox, however, made the biggest gains in this election by increasing its support by 5 percent or 28 parliamentary seats.²⁷⁵ As reflected in Table 6, Vox's electoral gains came from the center-right Citizens party, not the PP as in the April election. Much of Vox's campaign focused on the Catalan independence movement and the central government's inability to control the civil unrest that it brought to the region.

Shortly after the election results, Pedro Sanchez and Podemos' leader, Pablo Iglesias, finally put aside the disagreements that kept them from forming a government after the April election and agreed to form a minority government. This was a sudden and unexpected agreement, given that Sanchez refused to form a minority government with Podemos after the April election, and even claimed that the party's leadership "lacked experience and public management" to help resolve the Catalan issue.²⁷⁶ Still, their combined electoral results only added to 155 parliamentary seats, leaving them 21 seats short to form a government without the support of smaller parties. Sanchez was once again quick to return to the act of "pactism" to pursue the support of the separatist parties, ERC,

²⁷³ "Resultados Electorales en Total España: Elecciones Generales 2019," *El País*, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2019/generales/congreso/>.

²⁷⁴ *El País*.

²⁷⁵ *El País*.

²⁷⁶ Luis Ruiz, "Sánchez: «No Dormiría Tranquilo con Podemos en el Gobierno», ABC, September 19, 2019, https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-sanchez-dice-no-habria-podido-dormir-noche-unidas-podemos-gobierno-201909192203_noticia.html.

whose leader, Oriol Junqueras, is one of the separatist leaders in jail, and the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), the same parties that withdrew their support against the national budget a year before. ERC, in exchange for their support, provided a list of demands that included unlimited talks on an independence vote and amnesty for the jailed leaders.²⁷⁷ Sanchez, in exchange for their abstention on the second investiture vote, agreed to arrange negotiations between the central and Catalan government to “unblock the political conflict over the future of Catalonia and establish the basis for its resolution.”²⁷⁸

Pedro Sanchez was voted back in as the Spanish Prime Minister in the second round of the investiture debate, made possible due to the support of separatist parties.²⁷⁹ Sanchez took a huge gamble by reverting back to the use of “pactism” with the same separatist parties that used their parliamentary support to gain concessions toward the Catalan independence drive but withdrew their support when the central government refused to concede to their demands. The ERC spokesman, Gabriel Rufian, warned, during the investiture debate, that without bilateral negotiations toward independence, there “would be no legislature,” as his party has the parliamentary seats required to block any legislature in congress.²⁸⁰ If ERC withholds parliamentary support to pass future legislature, such as the national budget, scheduled for Congressional approval during the summer, it is highly possible that Sanchez will be forced to call another snap election. A new election would further increase the citizens’ dissatisfaction with mainstream parties, and possibly provide Vox a third Catalan political opportunity, from which, Vox may emerge as the second-largest political party in Spain.

²⁷⁷ “Catalan Party Moves to Back Spanish Coalition,” BBC News, November 25, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50553375>.

²⁷⁸ “Spain’s Political Deadlock Nears End,” BBC News, January 2, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50978510>.

²⁷⁹ Susana Urrea, “Pedro Sánchez Voted Back in as Spanish Prime Minister by Congress,” *El País* January 7, 2020, https://elpais.com/elpais/2020/01/07/inenglish/1578391109_970993.html.

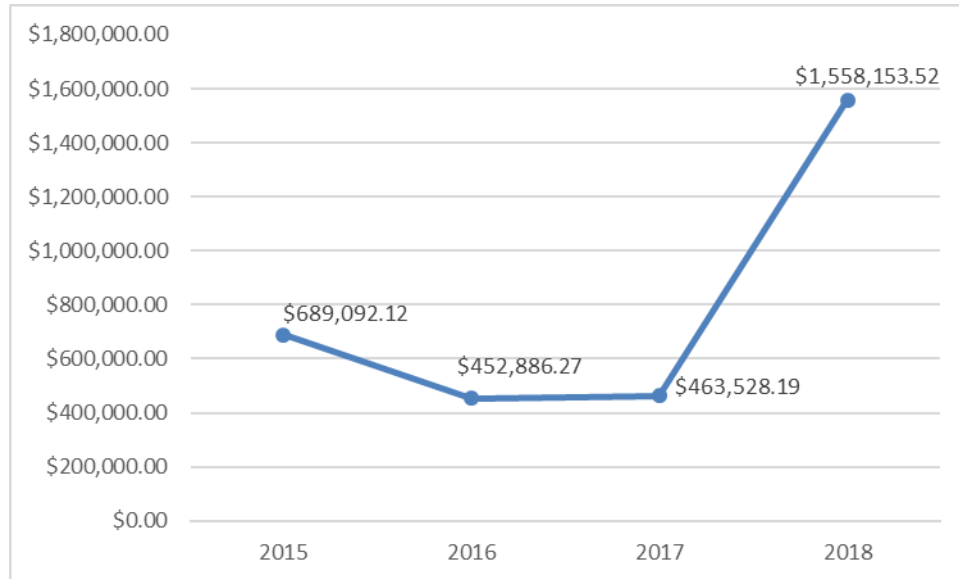
²⁸⁰ Inaki Ellakuria, “Gabriel Rufián Avisa a Pedro Sánchez: ‘Sin Mesa No Hay Legislatura,’” *El Mundo*, January 4, 2020, <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2020/01/04/5e10e78721efa08b1d8b457a.html>.

G. CONCLUSION

Since its inception in 2013, Vox had remained in the fringes as it struggled to gain traction in the mainstream political space. However, the Catalonia separatist movements and the inability of mainstream parties in the central government to control those movements, provided Vox the political opportunity it needed to attract supporters and gain national electoral victories. Even one of its leaders, Mr. Espinosa, admits that the party “never has had this much exposure if not for Catalonia”.²⁸¹ Vox obtained its big break after the Catalan separatist parties held an anti-constitutional referendum in October 2017, which the government of PP unsuccessfully attempted to prevent from taking place. However, the Popular Party’s attempt only instigated a wave of violence that exacerbated the separatist movements. Vox has since its inception defended the unity of Spain, but separatism had not threatened the sovereignty of Spain nor reached the level of violence that Catalan separatist movements have brought since October 2017. Vox’s strong Spanish nationalism and rhetoric against Catalan separatism began to garner the party support, apparent by the increase of monetary contributions beginning in 2018. Table 7 shows the monetary contributions that Vox received in the last four years and it illustrates the drastic increase of contributions received in the year 2018, a year that the Catalan issue assumed center stage.

²⁸¹ Gardner.

Table 7. Yearly Contributions Received by Vox (2015–2018)²⁸²



In addition to the Popular Party’s failure to suppress the Catalan Challenge, the party also faced a series of corruption allegations that saw its leader, Mariano Rajoy, ousted by Pedro Sanchez, in a no-confidence vote in June 2018. Sanchez, the leader of PSOE, managed to successfully pass a no-confidence motion, only due to the support of Catalan and Basque separatist parties in exchange for concessions. PSOE provided a series of concessions to the Catalan separatist leaders in order to retain their support to pass the national budget, that drew heavy criticism from all angles, but especially from Vox’s leader, Santiago Abascal, who claimed that Sanchez was placing the unity of Spain at risk by negotiating with separatists.²⁸³ The central government of PSOE began to be regarded as untrustworthy and too soft on the Catalan separatist parties. Nevertheless, Sanchez’s concessions did not satisfy the separatists, who withdrew their support to block the approval of the national budget. Sanchez had no choice but to call national elections to be held in April 2019, in which Vox experienced its first national election victory by securing

²⁸² “Cuentas Anuales,” VOX (blog), accessed December 5, 2019, <https://www.voxespana.es/cuentas-anuales>.

²⁸³ Torres, “Sánchez Faces Backlash over Catalan Concession.”

24 seats in the congress of deputies. The PSOE won the majority of seats in the April national elections but needed support to form a government, which led to six months of meaningless negotiations with the far-left party Podemos that further exacerbated the political instability and increased the citizens' dissatisfaction with political parties. Ultimately, the PSOE called for a second snap election to be held in November of 2019.

The government of PSOE, by calling for a second snap election provided Vox a second political opportunity to establish itself as the fiercest defender of Spain, as the Catalan independence movements, once again, turned violent. The sentencing of nine Catalan separatist leaders triggered a series of violent protests a month before the November election. All right-wing parties urged Sanchez to use his executive powers to quell the protests that were ravaging the region. However, Sanchez continued to promote dialogue and concord to resolve the crisis, appearing incompetent against the Catalan crisis. The central government's inactions against the Catalan violence made it look soft as Vox continued to promote hardline solutions, such as the application of article 116 of the constitution to impose martial law to restore order.

In the end, the national elections were held and the PSOE and Podemos received 10 fewer parliamentary seats than the previous election, and Vox once again emerged as the biggest winner, with 28 additional parliamentary seats. The results projected the continuation of the political deadlock that emerged in 2015. However, due to Sanchez's renewed use of "pactism" with the Catalan separatist party (ERC), the party supported Sanchez's investiture as Prime Minister and allowed the PSOE and Podemos to form a minority government. The support of separatist parties to form a minority government places the central government of Sanchez in a fragile state, and it is only a matter of time before Sanchez fails to satisfy the separatist parties' demands and leads them to withdraw their parliamentary support a second time. If the new minority government is unable to resolve the Catalan crisis and calls for new elections, Vox could, once again, be the party that benefits the most from the mainstream parties' failures and could possibly emerge as the second-largest party in Spain.

V. CONCLUSION

Spain's newest radical right-wing party, Vox, managed in eleven months to go from having no parliamentary representation to becoming the third-largest party in the country. Vox's rapid rise put an end to the Spanish exceptionalism to radical right-wing parties, enjoyed since the fall of the fascist regime in 1975. The rise of Vox echoes the broader European trend that has witnessed a wave of radical right-wing parties emerge from the fringes into the mainstream political arena in countries thought by many as exempt from this movement. This thesis found that Vox's ascendance was made possible by the actions and inactions of Spanish mainstream political parties.

The mainstream political parties failed to respond to the population's rising concerns over issues of immigration and Catalan separatism, both of which roiled Spanish society. Vox, in turn, was provided various political opportunities to assume center stage on these issues to gain electoral support. At the time of this writing, national opinion polls revealed that immigration and mainstream political parties are still considered prominent issues for Spain.²⁸⁴ If mainstream political parties continue to ignore the demands of the national electorate for politicians to address these two main issues, Vox may once again use the political void to claim these issues and continue to increase its electoral support, becoming the largest right-wing party in Spain.

A. IMMIGRATION REMAINS A MAIN ISSUE

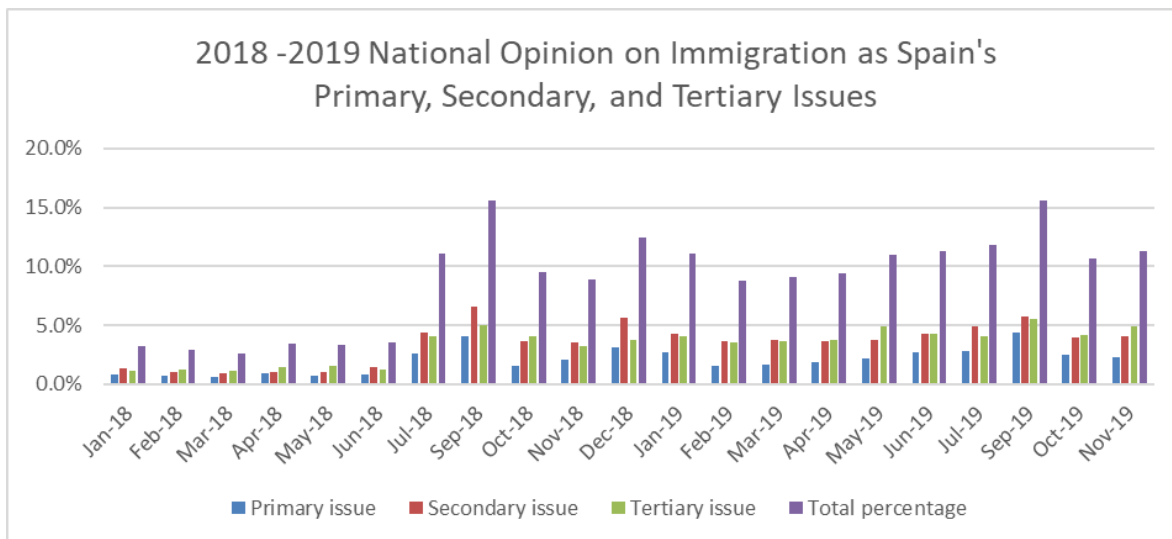
The rapid increase of immigration in 2018 and the mainstream parties' failure to address the increasing national concern provided Vox's first political opportunity to enter the mainstream political arena. Displaying "one of the key ideological features" of the far-right—nativism, a mixture of nationalism and xenophobia²⁸⁵—Vox used tactics drawn from the radical right and managed to bring the immigration issue to the forefront of the Andalusian regional election by framing immigrants as invaders and a threat to Spanish

²⁸⁴ "Ficha Del Estudio," Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, accessed March 9, 2020, http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/1_encuestas/estudios/ver.jsp?estudio=14479.

²⁸⁵ Mudde, 27.

society; Vox thus received 11 percent of the votes. Vox also normalized the discussion of the immigration issue by all Spain's right-wing parties—an issue that was not used for political gains by any parties until Vox stepped into the mainstream political spotlight to address it.²⁸⁶ The PP and Citizens Party further normalized the presence of Vox in the mainstream political arena by including the party in the formation of the Andalusian regional coalition government. Although Spain managed to reduce the immigration arrivals by more than half in 2019, in which it received 26,000 immigrants via the Strait of Gibraltar, compared to the 58,569 immigrants received in 2018, the national concern about immigration as a main issue remained high as of November 2019.²⁸⁷ Table 8 shows that the national opinion on immigration as a main issue remained below 3.5 percent for the first half of 2018, a time that immigration arrivals remained relatively low.

Table 8. National Opinion on Immigration as a Main Issue (2018–2019)²⁸⁸



²⁸⁶ Beatriz Acha, “La Normalización ‘Exprés’ de Vox,” *Agenda Pública*, January 8, 2019, <http://agendapublica.elpais.com/la-normalizacion-expres-de-vox/>.

²⁸⁷ “Mediterranean Situation,” UNHCR, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5226>.

²⁸⁸ Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, “Ficha Del Estudio.”

However, the national opinion on immigration as a main issue drastically increased beginning in July 2018, after immigration arrivals began to increase and presented challenges to the region of Andalusia; consequently, the national concern over immigration has remained above 9 percent to date. The continuous high level of national concern over immigration suggests that there is still a demand for a party to address the electorate's concern about this issue. If mainstream parties continue to fail to address the national anxieties over the immigration issue, Vox could continue to use immigration as one of its main issues in future elections to undermine the mainstream parties and further increase its electoral support.

B. CATALAN SEPARATISM REMAINS A MAIN ISSUE

Catalan separatist movements have, since 2014, brought and continue to bring major political challenges to the Spanish central government. The PP's and PSOE's past failures to resolve the Catalan crisis have made both parties appear incompetent against the separatist movements, thereby providing Vox the political opportunity to enter into the national political arena. Vox assumed center stage with its nativist and authoritarian ideologies to present itself as the best party to defend the unity of Spain. Cas Mudde uses the term "authoritarianism" as an ideology that believes in a strictly ordered society, one that severely punishes violators, in this case, the Catalan separatist party leaders.²⁸⁹ The social unrest and violent protests in Catalonia against the imprisonment of separatist leaders, allowed Vox to tap into Spanish nationalism during both 2019 national elections. Vox presented itself as the fiercest defender of the unity of Spain—and enjoyed a rapid rise into the mainstream political domain by winning 10.3 percent and 15.1 percent of the votes, respectively, and emerging as the third most-voted party in Spain.²⁹⁰

The national election held in November 2019 only benefitted Vox, who emerged as the third-largest political force in Spain and provided the left-wing parties even less parliamentary seats to form a government, signaling the continuation of the political deadlock that emerged in 2015. However, Sanchez once again resorted to the use of

²⁸⁹ Mudde, 29.

²⁹⁰ Valdivia, "Far-Right Party."

“pactism” with the separatist parties, ERC and PNV, to support the formation of a PSOE-Podemos minority government, placing the stability of the central government in a fragile state. Sanchez was voted back in as the prime minister of Spain on 7 January 2020, thanks to the support of the same separatist parties that withdrew their support in 2019, and caused the snap election, when the central government failed to concede to their secessionist demands.²⁹¹

The Catalan separatist parties have continued to demonstrate that any other option, besides the complete secession from Spain is not on the table. Nevertheless, Sanchez negotiated with Catalan’s secessionist leaders for their support to form a government—negotiations that prompted Vox to double down against Sanchez’s government. In November 2019, after the national elections were held, the Catalan regional parliament, once again, defied the constitutional court and the central government by approving a motion on self-determination.²⁹² The motion indicated the unyielding determination of the separatist parties to secede from Spain. More significantly, the jailed leader of ERC, the party that made the investiture of Sanchez possible, Oriol Junqueras, claimed on 28 January 2020, that “a self-determination referendum is a normal thing” and that the party plans to continue to push for Catalan self-determination.²⁹³

After the confirmation of Sanchez as prime minister, Vox staged demonstrations across Spain to protest against the “traitor” of the nation for negotiating with secessionists.²⁹⁴ The protests gathered 100,000 protesters across Spain—keeping the Catalan issue at the forefront of Spanish politics. It is likely that Sanchez will face strong challenges to appease the separatist parties to support the passing of the national budget

²⁹¹ Urra, “Pedro Sánchez Voted Back in as Spanish Prime Minister by Congress.”

²⁹² Joan Faus and Emma Pinedo, “Catalan Parliament Defies Spanish Court with Motion on Self-Determination,” Reuters, November 12, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-politics-catalonia-parliament-idUSKBN1XM15F>.

²⁹³ Joan Faus, “Jailed Catalan Separatist Leader Predicts New Referendum,” Business Insider, January 28, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/jailed-catalan-separatist-leader-predicts-new-referendum-2020-1>.

²⁹⁴ Josep Catà Figuls, “Spain’s Far-Right Vox Stages Marches against ‘Traitor’ PM Pedro Sánchez,” *El País*, January 13, 2020, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2020/01/13/inenglish/1578905060_772427.html.

through congress without negotiating an independence referendum with the Catalan separatists.²⁹⁵ The Catalan crisis remains alive and well, and it is only a matter of time until it erupts into violence and assumes center stage in the political domain. Undoubtedly, it was the Catalan crisis that propelled Vox to its current position, and Vox will most likely be the party that benefits the most from another snap national election, brought by the Catalan separatist parties' withdrawal of parliamentary support.

C. IMPACTS OF VOX'S ASCENDANCE

Vox did not only end the so-called Spanish exceptionalism, it has also changed the political landscape by gaining representation in local, regional, national, and European elections, which has lent the party considerable influence on policy-making at all levels of government and influenced other political parties to adopt some of its radical rhetoric. Figure 1 shows how Vox's electoral fortune was sporadic and insignificant until the Andalusian election in December 2018, from which point, Vox gained the political momentum to become the third most-voted party in Spain.

Elections	Votes	% Votes	Seats
European Parliament (May 2014)	246,833	1.57%	0
Parliament of Andalusia (March 2015)	18,017	0.45%	0
Local elections (May 2015)	50,195	0.25%	22
Regional elections (May 2015) ⁴	74,531	0.39% (mean)	0
National elections (December 2015)	58,114	0.23%	0
National elections (June 2016)	47,182	0.2%	0
Parliament of Andalusia (December 2018)	395,978	10.97%	12
National elections (April 2019)	2,677,173	10.25%	24
Parliament of Valencia (April 2019)	278,947	10.44%	10
Local elections (May 2019)	659,736	2.9%	530
Regional elections ⁵ (May 2019)	684,312	5.74% (mean)	27
European Parliament (May 2019)	1,388,681	6.2%	3
National elections (November 2019)	3,639,772	15.09%	52

Figure 1. Vox's Election Results (2014–2019)²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Carlos E. Cué, "Spanish Prime Minister Announces Date of Meeting with Catalan Premier," *El País*, January 21, 2020, https://elpais.com/elpais/2020/01/21/inenglish/1579598106_545045.html.

²⁹⁶ Adapted from Barquero, "The Electoral Breakthrough of the Radical Right in Spain," 2.

1. Vox's and Contemporary Spanish Politics

Before the appearance of Vox in the mainstream political scene, Spanish center-right political parties remained clear of radical right-wing discourses, but visibly moved further right of the political spectrum to compete against Vox's radical rhetoric. Vox introduced xenophobic and nationalistic language that had not been used by other right-wing parties until its arrival. During the 2018 regional Andalusian election, the issue of immigration became a central topic for Vox, and ultimately led the mainstream center-right wing party, PP, to adopt the anti-immigration rhetoric to capture Vox's electorate.²⁹⁷ During both 2019 national elections, all right-wing parties adopted a hard-line approach against the Catalan separatists to compete with Vox's nationalistic and radical discourses.²⁹⁸ Nonetheless, Vox's presence had an immediate impact in the political domain by triggering the PP and Citizens party to swing further right and use radical discourses.

Just after celebrating its first real electoral victory in Andalusia and playing kingmaker in the regional government, Vox used its political influence to push its radical agenda. Using its 12 regional congressional seats, Vox threatened to block the passing of the regional budget unless its parliament implemented harder line policies against immigration.²⁹⁹ The PP and Citizens leaders, in order to pass the regional budget, conceded to Vox's demands and cut 600,000 euros in funding from immigration integration programs. Vox also pushed its anti-feminist agenda by canceling funding that paid for a hotline for abused women and also cut funding for the "democratic memory," a program designed to support the families of victims of the Spanish Civil War and Franco dictatorship.³⁰⁰ Vox does not yet have enough parliamentary representation to make a

²⁹⁷ Natalia Junquera, "La Estrategia de Casado Frente a Vox Divide a los dirigentes del PP," *El País*, November 26, 2018, https://elpais.com/politica/2018/11/25/actualidad/1543176128_409535.html.

²⁹⁸ Natalia Junquera, "PP y Vox Compiten por Ser la Voz de 'La España que Madruga,'" *El País*, November 23, 2018, https://elpais.com/politica/2018/11/22/actualidad/1542844409_768373.html.

²⁹⁹ Lourdes Lucio, "Far Right in Spain: Vox Uses Budget Dispute in Andalusia to Push Its Far-Right Agenda," *El País*, June 13, 2019, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2019/06/13/inenglish/1560421836_561269.html.

³⁰⁰ Lucio.

significant impact at a national level, although, it has opposed the formation of central governments for both national elections, hoping for the continuation of the political deadlock for its own electoral benefit. It is apparent that Vox, with a parliamentary majority, will pose a significant threat to Spain's democratic policies that have made Spain one of the most liberal countries in the world.

2. Vox and EU Politics

Vox emerged during a time that Cas Mudde calls the fourth wave a far-right politics that has swept across Europe since the start of this millennium.³⁰¹ Europe has witnessed the rise of Euro-skeptic and anti-immigration parties, such as the AfD from Germany and the League of Italy. Vox resembles these parties' anti-immigration rhetoric but retains one major difference from other radical right-wing parties in Europe—it has remained pro-Europe. However, the EU Court of Justice recently became involved with the Catalan Separatism issue, which may change Vox's commitment to the European project.

The Court ruled in December 2019 that one of the nine jailed Catalan separatist leaders, Oriol Junqueras, was entitled to immunity for the political crimes that the Spanish top court imposed.³⁰² Junqueras had been sentenced to 13 years in jail by the Spanish Supreme Court in October 2019 but was elected as a European parliamentarian (MEP) in May of the same year. To make matters worse, the ex-Catalan president, Carles Puigdemont, and his associate, Antoni Comin, who have been in self-imposed exile in Belgium since 2017, were also elected as MEPs in May but were unable to return to Spain to assume their position for fear of arrests. However, after the EU's Court of Justice ruling, the two exiled members were allowed to take their seats in the European Parliament by the European Union and vowed to remind Europe that the Catalan crisis is not a Spanish issue,

³⁰¹ Mudde, 20.

³⁰² James Badcock and James Crisp, "EU Court Rules Jailed Catalan Independence Leader Wrongly Stripped of Immunity," *The Telegraph*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/12/19/eu-court-rules-catalan-independence-leader-should-released/>.

but a European one, and promised to push the Catalan secession into the European agenda.³⁰³

Vox supporters called for a Brexit style exit from the EU, which they called “Spaxit,” but Vox’s leader, Abascal, did not comment on this request.³⁰⁴ However, Abascal did say that the EU’s court undermined the Spanish supreme court’s ruling and effectively attacked the sovereignty and security of Spain by allowing the two self-exiled fugitives to assume the MEP positions. Abascal further added “Spain should not abide by any judgment of those who attack Spain’s sovereignty,” and that he would not allow more humiliations.³⁰⁵ At this point, it would be an easy transition for Vox to include the Eurosceptic rhetoric that most of the European far right-wing parties use in their discourses. Vox’s new Eurosceptic attitude could bring greater implications to the European project if the party manages to gain majority representation in another snap election. Vox could block EU’s immigration policies, as Hungary’s radical right-wing leader, Viktor Orban, blocked Merkel’s EU’s proposed refugee redistribution plan in 2015.³⁰⁶ In a worst-case scenario, Vox could consider the new “Spaxit” proposition made by his loyal followers—a road that would take the EU’s fourth-largest economy out and further deteriorate the European political stability.

In a larger sense, Vox’s potential impacts on the European project are just possibilities that could take place if Spain’s mainstream parties do not assume center stage on issues that raise the electorates’ concerns to prevent future political opportunities for Vox. The Spanish case is another example that illustrates how far right-wing parties can rapidly emerge from irrelevance to becoming a major national political party. Vox’s ascendance also demonstrates that the radical right has become the new norm in Europe.

³⁰³ Thierry Chiarello, “Catalan Separatists Take Seats as EU Lawmakers, Promise to Push Secession,” Reuters, January 13, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-politics-catalonia-eu-idUSKBN1ZC1N2>.

³⁰⁴ James Crisp, “Spain’s Vox Party under Pressure to Back ‘Spaxit’ after EU Court Ruling,” *The Telegraph*, December 21, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/12/21/spains-vox-party-pressure-back-spaxit-eu-court-ruling/>.

³⁰⁵ Crisp.

³⁰⁶ Mudde, 128.

The next steps—in Spain and perhaps the rest of the EU, now depend on the mainstream political parties' actions.

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