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Abstract

Radical right-wing parties often use the attack on feminism as a central argument in their political discourse. The Spanish political party Vox, born in 2013, is a good example of this phenomenon. This paper analyzes Vox's Instagram posts for the party's two last electoral campaigns previous to the two successive general elections held in Spain in 2019. After the collection, selection and quantification of these data, we carried out a qualitative analysis of the semantic networks created through the utilization of images, videos, texts, interactions, hashtags and emojis. Our findings identify five fundamental arguments: classic gender nationalism, anti-Muslim gender nationalism, delegitimization and ridicule of feminism, discrediting the concept of gender, and the idea that Vox is, in fact, the party that most advocates for women. An outstanding discursive strategy used throughout the sample is that of contrast and association. Signifiers with a strong positive signified and broad social acceptance (euphoric terms) are associated with this party and its political positions. In contrast, negatively charged signifiers and hate-insulting terms (dysphoric) are associated with feminism and the so-called "gender ideology."

Keywords

anti-genderism, gender ideology, Instagram, PRR (populist radical right), radical right, Spain general election 2019, Vox, anti-feminism

Introduction

Literature on gender and *far right* (see among others Akkerman, 2015; Erzeel and Rashkova, 2017; Köttig et al., 2017; Norocel, 2013; Sauer, 2020; Spierings, 2020) shows that anti-genderism is of crucial importance in the ideological framework of the *far right*, as it serves to maintain social order, to oppose elites and their progressive project which has supposedly gone too far in challenging traditional gender roles and families, and to promote an "Us vs. Them" mentality based on the supposed threat of external enemies against autochthonous society members. The evidence presented in this paper brings further data to the centrality of anti-genderism in the ideology of the *far right*.

The Spanish political party Vox, born in 2013, is an example of how radical right-wing groups (many of which emerged in Europe after the 2008 crisis) place women, feminism and "gender ideology" at the center of their discourse in order to instigate fear of the disintegration of the family, of the loss of traditional values and, as a result, of the loss of male supremacy. All these fears are the epitome of one fundamental fear: the loss of national identity

(Wodak, 2017). As many right-wing populist parties do, Vox uses a politics of fear strategy that consists of instrumentalizing specific minorities that are labeled as the dangerous "other" and perceived as a threat "to us," to "our" nation (Wodak, 2015). On April 28, for its first time Vox obtained representation at a national level, and, only 6 months later, Vox achieved double their number of seats in Congress and became the third political party in the Spanish Parliament, with 15.09% of the votes and 52 seats. Supervised and guided by Steve Bannon, Vox's presence on social media has played a key role in their electoral success. Vox's popularity among young voters becomes most evident on Instagram, where Vox is the most followed

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Spanish political party and has the highest levels of interaction and commitment at a national level (Cea, 2019).

This paper conducts a thorough discursive analysis of Vox's Instagram activity on the party's official account during the 2 months prior to the general elections of April 28 and November 10, 2019 with a specific focus on women, feminism and the so-called "gender ideology."

Theoretical framework

Europe's radical right

The label *far right* is an umbrella term that comprises both extreme-right and radical-right parties (Ferreira, 2019). Strictly speaking, the extreme right rejects the democratic system (Mudde, 2020) and even supports the use of violence to achieve its ends (Norris, 2005). In contrast, the radical right-wing accepts democracy but rejects some substantial aspects such as minority rights and pluralism (Mudde, 2020).

Radical right-wing parties have achieved significant electoral success in Europe in recent years (Caiani, 2019). Their presence in the political landscape has been normalized and their discourse has strongly influenced other right-wing and center-right parties. Furthermore, the issues considered as priorities by the *far right* have become central elements in the media agenda (Flew and Iosifidis, 2020), as shown by the constructed refugee crisis in 2015. Researchers such as Cas Mudde (2019) already speak of a fourth ultra-right wave, characterized by a strong media resonance and a widespread acceptance of its postulates. Additionally, this wave has caused a shift from the classical left-right axis to the so-called GAL-TAN axis (Simon, 2019). This axis vertebrates the political framework and the electorate's behavior around two types of political groups: the green, alternative and liberal groups (GAL) as opposed to the traditional, authoritarian and nationalist (TAN) groups (Hooghe and Marks, 2016; Hooghe et al., 2002). Nativism, authoritarianism and conservatism are the three defining traits around which Vox and other radical right-wing European groups are framed (Ferreira, 2019).

Nativism combines nationalism and xenophobia. It protects nationals, considered as "true" or "natural," from significant dangers or threats that materialize in a particular group of immigrants. Its aim is to preserve the cultural, racial and political status quo (Betz, 2017; Guia, 2016: 110–111). Despite the fact that an economic model is not a determining factor in this type of political party's discourse (Afonso and De Lange, 2016; Rovny, 2013), *radical right* parties merge nativism with the so-called chauvinism of the Welfare State, which holds that rights should be solely reserved for natives (Betz, 2019; Ennsner-Jedenastik, 2018). Nativism and Welfare State chauvinism contribute to building an identity that erases fundamental

differences between citizens (voter segments) such as class, ideology or gender. *Authoritarianism* requires for the government to have a significant moral weight in citizens' freedoms and rights (Hooghe et al., 2002). It favors strict order and severe punishment for violations (Mudde, 2010) as this will provide "welfare and security" against a number of dangers (Duckitt et al., 2010: 708). *Conservatism* is prominently reflected in the defense of traditional values associated with religion, the natural family and anti-feminism (Ferreira, 2019: 94). Such values are typical of the so-called *anti-gender ideology*, supported by Vox in Spain and by other *far right* European parties, such as the FPÖ (Freedom Party) in Austria, AfD (Alternative for Germany), Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) in Belgium, SVP (Swiss People's Party), La Liga in Italy, PiS (Law and Justice) in Poland, Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Union) or SNS (Slovak National Party). It should be noted that not only radical right-wing formations defend the anti-gender ideology and agenda, but also some politicians who identify as progressive, such as Rafael Correa in Ecuador or Lionel Jospin and Michel Rocard in France (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018).

Anti-feminism is closely tied to nativism through *gender nationalism* (Hadj-Abdou, 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2005), which is currently twofold. Classical gender nationalism sees women as "the nation's biological breeders" (Yuval-Davis, 1996: 22) and therefore understands the family as heterosexual and patriarchal. Thus, the man's role is to produce and the woman's role is to reproduce and take care of others. Women guarantee the survival of the native community in the face of a threat to their identity and their future, posed by immigrants (Bracke and Hernández Aguilar, 2020; Hadj-Abdou, 2019).

The argument about gender and the nation is crucial to Vox's ideology, which specifically rests on three closely interconnected pillars: anti-feminism, anti-immigration, and anti-Catalanism (rather than nationalism as it is based on hate rather than a clear country model). Vox is different from other European radical-right parties in that the trigger of Vox's success was the Catalan question more than the immigration situation in Spain.

The so-called anti-Muslim gender nationalism is based on the idea that Islam oppresses women and hinders the possibility of granting men and women equal rights. This is reminiscent of quasi-feminist attitudes (Đurinová and Malová, 2017; Mudde, 2007), which define gender equality as a distinctively Western and European value as opposed to Muslim values, deemed as primitive and oppressive for women, thus providing natives with a justification to reject Muslim immigrants. Radical right-wing parties advocate for women's rights in an instrumental way; that is, insofar as women's rights enable them to adopt an anti-Islamic and anti-immigration position (Akkerman, 2015; Hadj-Abdou, 2017; Hoerner, 2016; Scrinzi, 2017; Wodak, 2017).

PRR parties and social media

The term *populist radical right (PRR)*, coined by Cas Mudde, has made its way among scholars to refer to nativist, authoritarian and populist parties (Mudde, 2007). The populism of these parties is built upon the existence of two opposing forces: the elites and the people (Mudde and Rovira, 2017). As controversial as academic debates on populism are, it is inevitable to allude to this concept when analyzing Vox's ideology and discursive strategies. This paper contributes to provide some evidence of Vox's prevalent use of this oppositional discourse in social media.

Contemporary populism has also shown to have a correlation with active use of social media platforms as an alternative to communicating through traditional media, the latter being commonly associated with the elites (Flew and Iosifidis, 2020). Social media allows for direct communication between political parties, candidates and potential voters. The absence of intermediation enables parties to have full control over their discourse. Vox, for instance, chose to communicate with its target audience through Instagram, because 66% of Instagram users in Spain are young people under 30 years old (Galeano, 2019), and it was precisely young men who Vox identified as their main potential voters (19.4% of Vox voters were young men under 30, while only 6.5% were women in that age group, CIS, 2019). As of today, Vox is the most followed Spanish political party on Instagram (533,925 followers), doubling the second most followed party, Unidas Podemos (241,167 followers), and quintupling Ciudadanos (110,094 followers), PP (101,155 followers) and PSOE (96,969 followers).¹ Vox also enjoys the highest levels of interaction and engagement (Cea, 2019).

As far as women's descriptive political representation is concerned, 25% of Vox's National Executive Committee are women (3 out of 12 members), none of which hold the position of president, vice-president, treasurer or secretary (Vox, 2020). With regard to Vox's female representation in Parliament, out of the 52 members of the parliamentary group only 14 are women (Vera, 2019). As for Vox's prototypical voter profile, male potential voters doubled female potential voters at the time immediately prior to the 2019 elections (CIS, 2019). This gender disproportion, highly unusual in the overall Spanish party landscape, aligns with Vox's anti-feminist discourse. Our analysis is aimed at grasping aspects related to the substantive representation of women on Vox's Instagram; that is, the content and ideas displayed on this platform having to do with gender equality or, more accurately, anti-genderism. Acoustic or discursive symbols are not specifically analyzed in this paper. However, we do employ a symbolic representation approach when it comes to examining the degree to which representatives become "symbols" that can generate emotional ties and psychological reactions on citizens (Celis et al., 2008;

Childs, 2004; Kenny and Verge, 2016; Krook, 2009; Meier and Verge, 2017; Verge et al., 2020).

Vox's social media strategy was designed, among others, by Steve Bannon, Donald Trump's former chief strategist and senior counselor. Bannon's political campaigns are rooted in an appeal to basic emotions as well as in the construction of a closed group identity built around the feeling of loss of traditional values (Papacharissi, 2015), two common themes in Vox's social media discourse.

Anti-feminist discourse

Backlash against the women's rights movement is historical and runs parallel to the social progress achieved (Faludi, 1991; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Paternotte, 2020; Verloo, 2018; Verloo and Paternotte, 2018). Recent anti-feminism is developing in lockstep with public policies implemented by international organizations and states (Kantola and Lombardo, 2019). After decades of sustained progress on gender equality, a new wave of resistance toward the so-called "gender ideology" is breaking out in Europe. This resistance manifests itself in the articulated opposition to legislation and policies that seek to combat discrimination and respond to the challenges posed by gender equality (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017) such as equal marriage, women's rights over their bodies and sexuality, reproductive technologies, gender mainstreaming, sex education, etc.

Social media are playing a major role in this reaction against women's rights, as *far right* parties make heavy use of bots to disseminate slogans and fake news around the world (Carter Olsen and LaPoe, 2017). The Women Against Feminism campaign that began on Tumblr in 2013 and was later disseminated using the Twitter hashtag #WomenAgainstFeminism, or the masculinist reaction #HimToo in 2018 against the movement #MeToo (Asimov, 2018; Ellis, 2018; Segall, 2018) are some examples of this phenomenon. *Far right-wing parties* have appropriated hate speech against "gender ideology" in social media (Eksi and Wood, 2019; Silva and Ornat, 2020). In fact, these groups are, in numerous countries, "the main drivers of anti-gender campaigns" (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018). Feminism has been targeted by Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and by Donald Trump in the United States (Abuet Osuna and Cáceres Soforza, 2019), almost as much as immigration, as well as in Europe for example, by the FPÖ (Netherlands), Law and Justice (Poland) or Fidesz (Hungary). Furthermore, it is common for gender equality, nationalism and immigration to connect and conflict through the discourse of women's security (Sager and Mulinari, 2018).

In Spain, Vox has adopted the same strategy and agenda of the three previous anti-gender waves, which took place in 2005, 2008–2009 and 2012 as a reaction to the equality laws approved by the Socialist Party (PSOE) between 2004 and 2011 (Cornejo-Valle and Pichardo, 2018). Attacks on

Table 1. Post categorization data validation table: three samples of each type of post (video carousel, video and image).

Instagram post (IP)	P1	P4	P13
Date	02-28-2019	03-19-2019	04-28-2019
Format	Video carousel	Video	Image (meme)
Link	Central issue	Central issue	Reference
Topic	Classic gender nationalism	Classic gender nationalism	Classic gender nationalism
Enunciator	Rocío Monasterio	Ordinary people	Fighter meme character
Key signifiers and signifieds	Feminism, totalitarian doctrine, selfishness, confrontation, loneliness. Family, common project, complementarity.	Natural-patriarchal family. Military and legionary parents. Loving and protecting family. Unfair treatment public authorities.	Feminism and other threats jeopardize the continuity of the nation-state, Spain.
Interactions: likes and comments /views and comments	20.831	88.656	141.414
Hashtags and emojis	#EspañaViva (Living Spain), #Feminismo (feminism) Emojis: arrows.	#FelizDiaDelPadre (Happy Father's Day), #19Marzo (March 19), #QueridoPapi (Dear dad) Emojis: man, heart, winking face, victory hand.	#PorEspaña (for Spain), #EleccionesGenerales (General election), #Elecciones (Election), #28A (April 28), #Vox Emojis: crossed swords, flag: Spain.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

feminism and the exaltation of the traditional role of women in the family constitute the backbone of Vox's discourse since its foundation. In fact, one of the breaking points between Vox and PP, to which Vox's current leader belonged from 1994 to 2013, was the latter's refusal to support the Law on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (2010)'s repeal. This point was later included in the Vox Foundation Manifesto and in the two versions of the party's Statutes. Furthermore, the party has identified the repeal of the Organic Law on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender Violence (2004) and the Law against Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression and Sexual Characteristics, and Social Equality (2017) as its main objectives.

Methodological framework

Our starting observation argues for the centrality of gender in Vox's discourse, as it typically is in PRR discourse, despite the scarce presence of this argument in mainstream literature dedicated to studying the far right. Vox's campaigns are often built around debates about feminism and equality, along with other issues such as immigration and the loss of Spanish traditional values. This paper aims to analyze the mechanisms behind Vox's discourse, which, we argue, is based on ideological value oppositions. The main objective of our analysis is grasping the substantive representation of gender, though symbolic representation is sometimes addressed to highlight the different attitudes

adopted by Vox's female and male representatives on Vox's Instagram posts.

To this end, we first conducted a quantitative analysis of Vox's official Instagram account's contents during the 2 months prior to April 28th (February 28th to April 28th, 2019) and November 10th (September 10th to November 10th, 2019). Having collected and sorted posts from the two chosen time frames (237 posts in total: 156 and 81, respectively), we selected a sample of 35 posts dealing specifically with women and feminism. Then, as shown on Table 1, we elaborated validation tables to categorize the 35 selected posts (IP), where they appear chronologically arranged and numbered. Next, we identified and quantified the variables corresponding to the most significant aspects of each post: the post format (video, video carousel or image); how it is linked to women, feminism and "gender ideology" (central issue or reference); the topics tackled (classic gender nationalism, anti-Muslim gender nationalism, delegitimizing or ridiculing feminism, criticizing the concept of gender, perceiving Vox as the party that most advocates for women, and others); the enunciators identified within the text; the number of interactions; and, finally, the hashtags and emojis used.

Having categorized the data, we conducted a qualitative discourse analysis (Greimas and Fontanille, 1994) of the sample to assess how women, feminism and "gender ideology" are represented in these posts, based on a number of categories derived from anti-feminist discourse strategies. We also expose the underlying purpose of the language and discursive strategies, such as the use of

Table 2. Euphoric and dysphoric terms.

Euphoric terms	Dysphoric terms
“Ordinary people,” “normal people,” “loyal and compliant Spaniards,” “majorities”	“elites,” “oligarchies,” “lobby,” “disloyal Spaniards,” “a minority”
“Common sense,” “normal,” “what we’re all taught at home”	“the opposite of common sense,” “madness,” “craze,” “nonsense”
“Freedom,” “security,” “family,” “true European values”	“dictatorship,” “bigotry,” “radicalism,” “imposition,” “intolerance,” “violence”

Source: Prepared by the authors.

euphoric and dysphoric terms, modal verbs or qualifying adjectives repeatedly employed in the selected posts.

Results and discussion

Posts: types and topics

In the time between February 28th and April 28, 2019, Vox shared a total of 81 posts on Instagram, out of which 14 (17.2%) revolved around women or were aimed to attack feminism and gender ideology. Out of the 156 posts shared by Vox between September 10 and November 10, 2019, 21 (13.4%) revolved around women or attacked feminism and gender ideology. The percentage of Instagram posts about women and feminism are thus practically the same in both time frames. The same is true for the predominant post format (videos), topics discussed, enunciators, level of interaction, hashtags, emojis, functions of language, key signifiers, and semantic fields. Hence the relevance of examining these 35 posts as a unit and comparing and contrasting the results of one-time frame and the other. Regarding format, only two (5.8%) posts are images and 94.2% are videos, one third of which are carousels combining several short videos lasting between 1 and 3 minutes each. Usually, when the format of the post is a video carousel, the video duration is even shorter to encourage their followers to view all of them.

As for the topics discussed, women, feminism or gender ideology can be identified as the central issue in 62.8% out of the 35 selected posts. These posts, aimed at attacking feminism and “gender ideology,” follow some of the main discursive strategies described by Paternotte and Kuhar (2018): associations combined with contrast, “self-victimization,” the argument of giving the voice (Vox) back to the majorities, and invoking the figure of the innocent and endangered child. They also resort to “transfusion” a strategy typically employed in propaganda. When seeking to persuade or manipulate, discourses are not built from scratch but based on prior acceptance and rejection of certain concepts represented by a series of terms and expressions, as shown in Table 2. In Vox’s social media, euphoric terms are commonly associated with the party, while dysphoric terms are used to refer to the Spanish government and the European Union.

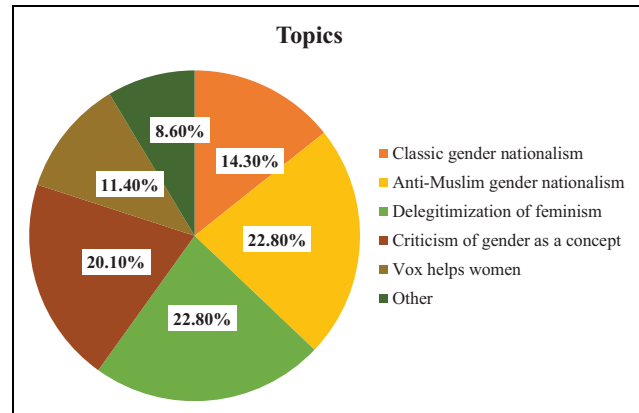


Figure 1. Topics tackled in the posts.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Although the remaining 37.2% posts are not exclusively about women, they still refer to feminism, gender ideology and the left as “dangers or threats.” This strategy, characterized by the repeated use of terms such as “neo-Marxism” or making specific reference to PSOE and Unidas Podemos, is aimed at proving that the left is responsible for devising, propagating and backing feminism.

The specific issues addressed in the 35 studied posts and their respective percentages are shown in Figure 1 and explained in more detail below.

- 14.3% of posts revolve around classic gender nationalism. They present the “natural” family and feminism as opposites, using expressions such as “we believe in a future for women that complements men’s, in women who have a common project with men, which is what the family is” (P. 1), as opposed to feminism, which is referred as “disloyal” and “Spain’s enemy” (P. 6).
- 22.8% of posts align with anti-Muslim gender nationalism. They are all in line with the basic approach: Islam and, by extension, Muslim immigrants, oppress women, which opposes the European and Spanish values of equality supported by Vox. Thus, signifiers such as “totalitarianism,” “oppression,” “discrimination,” “submission” and “radical Islamism,” applied to women, are used in contrast to terms such as “freedom,” “equality” and “dignity.”

- These utterances go beyond the alleged gender inequalities promoted by Islam, portraying Muslim men as aggressors and rapists,² with allegations such as “a foreigner is three times more likely [than a Spaniard] to rape, according to the statistics” (P. 32). Vox’s discourse counters signifieds and expressions such as “criminals,” “increase of assaults against women,” “sexual abuse,” “committing a crime,” “frightening,” “absurdity,” to signifieds such as “our girls,” “our women” and “protecting.”
- In a particularly illuminating publication (P. 25), a Vox leader connects classical gender nationalism and anti-Muslim gender nationalism within the framework of a conspiracy in which women’s wombs are used as a metaphor for a demographic invasion.
- 22.8% of posts are devoted toward delegitimizing and ridiculing feminism by attaching a negative connotation to terms derived from feminist theory such as “heteropatriarchy” or “inclusive language.”
- 20% of posts are aimed at criticizing the concept of gender itself. They refer to gender as “a trap,” “an indoctrination of our children,” “neo-Marxist politics,” “a monopoly,” “ultrafeminism,” “contempt for women” and “incomprehension” (P. 19). They demand that the political party Unidas Podemos “get their hands off our children.” “Gender laws” are portrayed as one of the major dangers for Spain (P. 10), as they have been supposedly devised to prevent parents from exercising their freedom to educate their children, and to make children believe that the so-called “intra-family” violence is motivated by gender (P. 16, P. 21 and P. 23).
- 11.4% of posts claim that Vox is the Spanish political party in Spain that stands up for women the most, as they demand the most severe penalties for aggressors and rapists, including life imprisonment. The same is true of gender-based violence, which Vox refers to as domestic violence (P. 5): “self-defense in the home” benefits “battered women” who could then defend themselves from “their abusers.” When referring to assaults against women and rape, the posts often resort to the innocent child strategy (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018), as in P. 5, for instance: “the 12-year-old girl in Azuqueca who was raped by four or five minors and today some are already back on the streets.”
- The remaining three posts (8.6%) are aimed at defending themselves as a party from accusations of being sexist.

Enunciator and functions of language

In one third (29.1%) of the selected posts the main enunciator is the leader and president of the party, Santiago

Abascal, in line with hyper leadership, a key aspect in today’s global political communication landscape (Mayer et al., 2020; Sampietro and Sanchez-Castillo, 2020).

Abascal’s leadership is balanced by two other members of the party: Ortega-Smith, Vox’s secretary general (17.1%), and Rocío Monasterio, president of Vox Madrid (11.4%) and the most prominent female member of Vox. Monasterio projects herself as a moderate person: she speaks at a slow pace, has a relaxed attitude, and smiles frequently. In contrast, Ortega-Smith’s *mise-en-scène* is characterized by a determined attitude, a faster speech pace, and angry facial expressions. Posts featuring Vox leaders often present them in contrast to their political opponents or renowned journalists.

In the remaining 42.4% of posts, the enunciators are Vox supporters and other party members. When female supporters are given a voice, their message revolves around the idea that women support Vox, also known as a vaccination strategy; that is, a way to get ahead and defend oneself from one of the most frequent attacks coming from Vox’s political opponents and media outlets that accuse the group of being sexist. Female supporters featured in the posts are usually young, since the party needs to attract young female voters. In contrast, male supporters featured in posts are of all ages and come from diverse social backgrounds in order to project the idea that they are part of a grassroots social movement.

The main functions of language present in the sample studied are the expressive and conative functions, not surprisingly, given the fact that social media require sensationalist messages addressing the audience in a very direct manner. To this end, a specific discursive strategy is put into play; namely, suggesting that the sender’s feelings and wishes (represented by the party leader, candidates and Vox supporters who act as enunciators in the text) match those of the receiver. Vox thus builds a group identity by appealing to shared feelings, impressions and desires and, consequently, by stating that “your wishes will come true if you vote [for Vox].”

The expressive function of language is reinforced by the abundant use of modal verbs, which reflects the sender’s attitude toward the utterance. Take Monasterio’s statement regarding feminism as an example: “We do not feel represented (. . .) we do not want them to speak for us (. . .) We believe in a future for women that is complemented by men” (P. 1); or Ortega-Smith on the dangers of Islam in Europe: “We who believe in the dignity of women, in equal rights for men, say that we do not want a Europe where women have to wear the burka” (P. 2).

Similarly, the conative function of language is reflected in the use of vocative words and phrases (many of the selected posts use the first-person plural), imperatives, infinitives, interrogative sentences and evaluative adjectives. Monasterio, for instance, often uses phrases including evaluative adjectives in connection with feminism (P. 1):

Table 3. Posts with the highest level of interaction.

Ranking	Instagram Posts (IG); date; format; link	Topic	Enunciator	Interactions
1	P26 10-11-2019; video; central issue	The party that best protects women	Santiago Abascal	376.170
2	P31 11-05-2019; video; reference	Ridiculing or delegitimizing feminism	Santiago Abascal	338.781
3	P35 11-08-2019; video; central issue	Gender-based violence	Female Vox supporter	317.940
4	P32 11-06-2019; video; central issue	Anti-Muslim gender nationalism	Iván Espinosa de los Monteros	279.512
5	P13 04-28-2019; image (meme); reference	Classic gender nationalism	Fighter character	141.414
6	P11 04-24-2019; video carousel; reference	The party that best protects women	Ordinary person	95.959
7	P. 33 11-07-2019 video carousel; central issue	Anti-Muslim gender nationalism	Santiago Abascal	91.825

Source: Prepared by the authors.

“selfish future and a future of solitude,” “exciting future” or “better future,” “loyal and compliant majorities,” “disloyal [minorities], squatters, hawkers and radical feminists.”

Interactions, hashtags and emojis

For the purpose of our analysis, we understand interactions to mean: regarding videos (21), the number of views and comments; with respect to carousel videos (12) and images (2), the number of “likes” and comments. Table 3 shows the seven posts with the highest level of interaction, distinguishing between video carousels, images and videos.

Vox’s discourse is built around war, as shown in the only meme image that can be found in the studied sample (P. 13), where Spain-Vox is personified as a fighter facing threats that put the survival of the nation-state at risk. The most successful posts are precisely those that show Vox’s enunciators as dialectical winners over journalists and political adversaries.

The two posts that represent Vox as the party that best protects women are those that demand tougher sentences for violent crimes against women. In the first one, the president of the party states that “we are the only ones who say that once a rapist goes to jail, he doesn’t have to leave” (P. 26). In the second one, a worker explains that “my wife says that Vox is the only political party that protects women, because they support life imprisonment for killers of women” (P. 11).

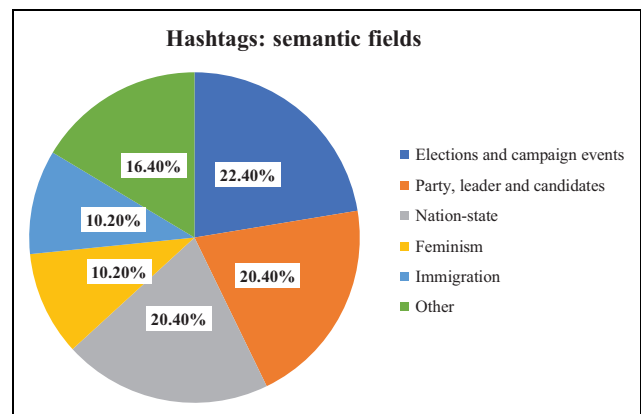


Figure 2. Most used hashtags grouped by semantic fields. Source: Prepared by the authors.

Two other publications are framed in anti-Muslim gender nationalism by associating foreigners with rape and sexual assault. The first one states that “they are three times more likely to rape” (P. 32); and the second one reports that “an unaccompanied foreign minor sexually abused a 10-year-old girl. By the way (...) he is already free. He will be able to lay his hands-on other girls, we imagine” (P. 33).

One of the posts revolving around classical gender nationalism presents feminism as one of the main threats against the survival of the nation-state; that is, the native community (P. 13). There is also a post that delegitimizes

Table 4. Key signifiers used.

Semantic field of “evil” Undesirable, unfair, bad, extreme, deviant	Semantic field of “good” Desirable, fair, good, balanced, normal
Totalitarian doctrine, indoctrination, totalitarianism, neo-Marxism, liberal dictatorship, socialist, leftists, ultrafeminism, animalism, radical, radical feminists, squatters, hawkers, minorities, multiculturalism. Politicians, elites, lobby, monopoly.	Spain, plasteboard Spain, eager beaver, farmer, country man, student.
Contempt for women, incomprehension, burqa, hijab, islam, radical islamism, jihadist, demographic invasion, invasion by substitution, women’s wombs.	People, grandfathers, grandmothers, (our) women, fathers, mothers, daughters, sisters, (our) girls.
Abortion, attack against the family, division, to go against men, battle of the sexes.	Family, common project, man and woman complement each other, man married to woman.
Crazy, against common sense, against normal things, fanaticisms, supremacist, stupidities, crazes, nonsense.	Common sense, reality, what we’re taught at home.
Oppression, discrimination, submission.	Equality, dignity, freedom.
Trap, lie, false concern, imposition.	To love, to protect, to opt for life.
Criminalization, end presumption of innocence, illegal immigration, foreigners, criminals, terrorists, foreign unaccompanied minors, rapists, assaults, sexual abuse, to commit a crime, to frighten, herds.	Severity, tightening of punishment.
Gender ideology, gender laws, gender-based violence, empowerment, heteropatriarchy, inclusive language.	Intra-family violence, not gendered.

feminism (P. 31) by associating it with “the liberal dictatorship responsible for dividing Spaniards and encouraging women to confront men.” Finally, a 23-second video posted by Vox on Instagram displays Wodak’s discursive strategy of “arrogance of ignorance” (Wodak, 2015). The video is centered around gender-based violence. In it, a young Vox supporter who, when asked by a journalist to re-read Vox’s proposals, replies: “I’ve read them, thank you.” The video ends with the “thug life” meme, widely popular in YouTube videos and other social media platforms. The signifier “thug life” appears in combination with two images, a pair of sunglasses and a joint, and a discursive symbol, the rap song *The Next Episode*, sounding in the background. The video utilizes the “thug life” meme to position the Vox sympathizer featured in the video as dialectically superior to the journalist from an ironic standpoint.

It is important to note that in five out of the seven posts with the highest level of interaction, Vox’s enunciators appear in a media outlet: four of them appear on television and the remaining one on a digital weekly newspaper. The media, and television in particular, significantly contribute to Vox’s high impact on Instagram.

Most publications include hashtags (71.4%) and emojis (94.2%). The studied sample includes 50 different hashtags. The most frequently used ones are: #Vox, #EspañaViva, #PorEspaña (for Spain), #EspañaSiempre (Spain forever), #SantiagoAbascal, #EleccionesGenerales (general election), #28A (April 28) and #Feminismo (feminism). If we group these hashtags by semantic fields, as shown in Figure 2, the most used ones have to do with the election and campaign-related events—those organized by Vox and Vox’s television appearances (22.4%), Vox’s leader and candidates (20.4%), the nation-state (20.4%), feminism (10.2%) and

immigration (10.2%). The “Other” category (16.3%) includes hashtags related to autonomic or European politics, such as #Madrid, #Ayuntamiento (City Hall), #UnionEuropea (European Union), #Europa (Europe) or #Soros.

Concerning emojis, 30 different types can be identified in the sample. The most used ones, the Clapping Hands (15%) and the Megaphone (10%) emojis, are employed to emphasize the success of Vox’s discourse. The importance of the nation-state is represented by the Flag: Spain emoji (10%), the threats that put the nation-state at risk are represented by the Police Car Light emoji (7%), and the need to resist and keep strong is represented both by the Flexed Biceps emoji (7%) and the High Voltage emoji (8%). The use of the High Voltage emoji constitutes a visual representation of the metaphor around which Vox’s discourse and image are built: “the storm.” The Television emoji signals the appearance of the party leader or any other Vox candidate on television. As previously mentioned, this is a crucial factor that should not be ignored given that the media, and particularly television, play a major role in increasing Vox’s impact on social media and especially on Instagram.

Key signifiers and semantic fields

As noted above, the line of argument adopted in these posts is completely simplistic and Manichean. Table 4 shows the main dichotomies existing in the conflicts presented in each of the posts we analyzed:

These arguments revolve around the good versus evil axis. It is a discourse exempt of ideological nuances, with no place for the complexities of political thought or social life. This type of discourse has been very successful since

2008, which marked the beginning of the last great crisis of the capitalist system and can be extremely successful as of today, among PRR parties' audiences through social media.

Conclusions

The general goal of this article is to study Vox's most representative strategies on Instagram as a means to explain their success in two successive elections, the first one on April 28th and the second on November 10th, 2019. In the April election Vox obtained 24 seats, and only a few months later, in November, they obtained 52 seats, making Vox the third political force in Spain, a country where the radical right had not had political representation since the restoration of democracy in 1978.

From an international perspective, radical right parties share three common themes in their political ideology: ultra-nationalism, anti-immigration and anti-feminism. In the case of Vox, it is clear that this last element, anti-feminism, was the main focus of their 2019 political campaigns, and a transversal theme in the party's entire ideology. As shown in this paper, Vox not only used gender to justify their opposition to immigration, but also to exalt ultra-nationalist values among the Spanish population.

The fundamental axis of the 2019 Vox campaigns on Instagram is discrediting the so-called gender ideology. The strategies employed by Vox match those used by other PRR parties: classic gender nationalism, anti-Muslim gender nationalism, delegitimization or mockery of feminism, and criticism of the concept of gender.

It is no accident that Vox's Instagram target are young men. Vox's electoral success can be explained by the existence of a cultural-ideological contradiction in Spanish society. While the development of feminist movements and institutional changes in favor of women's rights in Spain has been spectacular, especially since 2004 when the socialist government initiated a broad reform reflected in the Gender-Based Violence Act (2004), the Same Sex Marriage Act (2005) or the Equality Act (2007), there is a social consensus among conservative men who perceive equality policies as real "aggressions" against their "rights" and "privileges." It should not be forgotten that Spain is a country with a deep-rooted Catholic tradition and a very conservative approach regarding female roles both in society and the family. For years, conservative women have also been skeptical of the development of progressive policies involving gender and have supported discourses that present women as victims of progressivism.

Vox describes itself as "the party that stands up for women the most." This utterance is based on Vox's discourse around women's safety, founded on two fundamental pillars: the criminalization of immigrants and the toughening of penalties for sexual assault and "domestic violence." In addition, Vox denies the existence of gender-

based violence, stripping it of its structural nature. Denialism is another strategy commonly employed by radical right-wing parties. There is a great contradiction in Vox's use of a markedly anti-feminist and anti-gender discourse, portraying women as breeders and caretakers, and denying the existence of a gender imbalance in social structures, while simultaneously holding gender equality as a core value in European and Western societies that must be protected. We consider that, in line with other European radical right-wing parties, Vox has capitalized the notion of gender equality in order to be able to justify their Islamophobic discourses against Muslim immigrants in Spain.

A common strategy used by PRR parties is oppositional rhetoric. The use of Manichean-type contrasts such as "us/them," "good/evil," "pro-life/murderers," etc. constitutes one of Vox's most salient discursive strategies. A series of signifiers that appear time and again in Vox's Instagram posts create the effect of two opposing semantic fields that become the contenders in a battle that will decide whether the native community, its identity and traditions, will survive or disappear forever. Vox defines Spanish identity according to the party's principles, presenting anti-gender and anti-feminist ideology as a crucial quality of "Spanishness." The concept of "us" is built around self-victimization. They portray themselves as individuals who are constantly attacked and cornered by those who oppose their political and social ideals: "the others," and they often utilize innocent people's voices, such as children, oppressed minorities or people who are in danger and disregarded in public life, in order to get their message across.

Similar to other PRR parties, Vox's discourse is characterized by a strong emotional charge and a sensationalist tone. Rather than engaging in political debate, Vox directs all their efforts toward the creation of stereotypes of "the others," based on the assumption that "their" lifestyle and ideas do not match those of Vox supporters. Vox's heavy use of social media discourse markers such as hashtags and emojis reinforces the above-mentioned strategies and projects the idea that Vox and their target audience (mainly young men) share a common code. The combination of expressive and conative functions of language in Vox's Instagram posts allows them to shift from the construction of a group identity based on the appeal to desires, feelings and emotions to action, urging their followers to rise up and seek justice.

The analysis of Vox's Instagram activity during the 2019 elections in Spain corroborates the starting observation that Vox's communication strategies consist of spreading sensationalist messages and creating a culture of fear and a sense of loss of the core values and traditions. Their discourse is specifically aimed at perpetuating the divide between "us" and "them," and the instigation of hatred against feminism is essential to achieving this division.

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Notes

1. Data obtained from the parties' official Instagram accounts on April 6, 2020.
2. These affirmations are false, as they are not supported by empirical evidence. This applies to all offensive, xenophobic, misogynist and other discriminatory messages expressed by Vox on their Instagram account. Vox's hateful messages are exclusively reproduced in this paper for research purposes. The authors apologize in advance and have no intention in perpetuating negative stereotypes associated to any community or oppressed minority; quite the opposite.

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