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Vox and the Legacy of Franco: A Study of the Rise of the Populist Radical Right in Spain

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## 1. Abstract

Populist radical right parties succeeded electorally across Europe since the start of the 1980s. However, until 2018, the populist radical right was electorally irrelevant in Spain even as the populist radical right gained traction in the rest of Western Europe. There is very little literature explaining how Vox overcame obstacles in Spain to be the first party of its kind to have success in Spain. In this thesis, I examine how Vox fits into previous academic literature that explains the populist radical right and whether that literature applies to the case of Vox. I argue that the previous literature cannot completely explain the case of Spain. The reason that Vox has had electoral success is that Vox is the first party since the death of Francisco Franco to use the same narratives about Spanish identity and national origins to mobilize the imagined community of people that Franco created that believe in his conceptions of the nation.

## 2. Introduction

The topic of this thesis is populist radical right parties, specifically Vox, a Spanish political party formed in 2014. In my research, I attempted to answer the question, why Vox was the first populist radical right party to find success in Spain? To get deeper into this question, I researched why other parties failed and how Vox stands out both rhetorically and ideologically. I looked at the question of why Vox's electoral success has not been explained and who its supporters are.

What makes Vox different from the other populist radical right parties in Spain is that they have galvanized the imagined community that Franco created. Vox has done so by adopting Franco's message about Spanish identity and how the country should define itself. Additionally, Vox incorporated this message into a framework that accepts democracy. In the immediate aftermath of the death of Franco, the far-right, Francoist parties rejected democracy in favor of a return to an authoritarian state. That idea was not popular with the electorate of Spain. Those parties failed to unify the far-right, and therefore, never found success.

After the neo-Francoist parties disappeared, the Spanish far-right turned toward the rest of Europe and saw the success of the populist radical right. Parties such as España-2000, supported by the French party, National Front (now National Rally), tried to succeed with that same model. They were not able to gain electoral support because they did not adopt the Francoist narratives of Spanish identity and destiny. Without those narratives, the party was unable to galvanize the support of the people on the far-right of Spain's electorate. The mainstream right in Spain already took up positions against immigration, for a more centralized state and nativist policies. There was no room for a party if it did not have a Francoist stance

about the soul of Spain. Vox is different because it accepts Spanish democracy and combines that with the Francoist views of a pure, unified, Catholic Spain whose origin was the *Reconquista*, and that Spain faces political and religious enemies that seek to destroy it. This fierce rhetoric sets Vox apart from the other populist radical right parties in the recent past and allowed Vox to unify the Spanish far-right. The evidence of this can be found in the electoral successes beginning in the regional elections of Andalucía in 2018.

The people that support Vox are a part of the imagined community of people that Franco created that believe in a set of narratives. The narratives became important to the identity of some Spaniards during Franco's life and dictatorship and never disappeared after the transition to democracy, these people simply did not have a party that represented their beliefs. They went on supporting Franco's legacy, mourning his death and pushing back against the cultural liberalization of Spain. This community believes that the Nationalists fought a holy crusade in the Spanish Civil War to save the Soul of Spain and that the political left and non-Catholics continue to try to destroy Spain.

The reason that the rise of Vox has not been sufficiently explained before is that Vox's electoral success is so recent. There are very few scholarly articles on the topic, because Vox is such a new political phenomenon. Additionally, my explanation for the rise of Vox is interdisciplinary. I applied the anthropological concept of imagined communities to a political science framework for electoral success. The success of Vox is an exception to the explanations offered by political scientists for the success of populist radical right parties in Europe. This thesis goes beyond previous political science explanations to provide an explanation for Vox's electoral success.

In this paper I use the framework Cas Mudde developed in his book, Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe and I explain how Vox fits into this framework. Next, I discuss the few articles written about populist radical right parties in Spain and what they mean for the electoral rise of Vox. After the Literature Review, I explain the theoretical approach of the concept of imagined communities. In the case study section, I explain why I have chosen the case of Vox in Spain and go on to explain the historical background of the Franco regime. After the historical background section, I discuss the ways that the Franco regime shaped narratives about Spanish identity and national origin. I go on to discuss the failed far-right parties in the aftermath of the death of Franco through the 2000s and why those parties were unsuccessful. Finally, I explain the ideology and narrative program of Vox in detail. After the case study section, I analyze the information to explain the electoral success of Vox.

### **3. Literature Review**

The literature used in this thesis falls under three categories. The first, and most broad, is the theoretical and empirical examination of radical right populist parties in Europe. The second group of works concerns the topic of populist radical right parties in Spain. The third, and final, group of literature pertains specifically to the Vox and its ideology and discursive narratives about Spanish identity.

#### **Radical Right Populist Parties in Europe**

First, there is a vast amount of research into the rise of radical right populist parties in Europe. I selected the book, Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe by Cas Mudde because he is one of the foremost experts on the topic of far-right extremist parties in Europe and the

United States. Of the amount of research into populist radical right parties, Mudde says, “(d)espite its relatively limited electoral and political significance within European politics, particularly if compared to the established party families, no party family has been studied as intensely as the populist radical right” (Mudde 2). The book opens by defining the populist radical right, which is the definition I am using in this paper. It then goes on to define which parties are included under this definition. Vox is not included in the book because Mudde wrote the book in 2007, before the foundation of the party.

The book goes on to describe certain features of, and issues taken up by, populist radical right parties. First, Mudde describes the identity politics of populist radical right saying that they divide the world into ‘good’ and ‘evil’ (Mudde 63). He also says that these parties define the ingroup mainly through the demarcation of those outside the group or the “enemies”. Next, Mudde examines the topic of women in the populist radical right concluding that, “(a)lthough hard and reliable data are not always available, the evidence presented in this chapter points overwhelmingly in the same direction: at all levels (leadership, membership, electorate) there are fewer women than men within populist radical right parties (Mudde 117). He describes how although this is true for populist radical right parties in Europe, almost all political parties of all ideologies underrepresent women as a proportion of society. Following his discussion of women in populist radical right parties, Mudde explores how, contrary to the consensus of much of the literature, the economy is not a primary issue for the populist radical right. Instead, it is a secondary feature of their ideologies, used to actualize their core ideological positions of nativism authoritarianism and populism (Mudde 119, 120). Next, Mudde discusses the issue of democracy in the populist radical right. He says that “(p)opulist

radical right democracy is a combination of nativist, authoritarian, and populist democracy” (Mudde 155). Mudde argues that elements of the populist radical right’s idea of democracy are in direct opposition to elements of a liberal democracy. Subsequently, Mudde focuses on the topic of the European Union and Euroscepticism of the populist radical right saying that most of these parties began in favor of the EU and have become increasingly negative about the EU. Finally, the book discusses the connection between globalization the populist radical right saying that, “the two are connected in two fundamental ways. On the one hand, globalization is seen as one of the main causes of the recent electoral success of populist radical right parties in Europe. On the other hand, populist radical right parties are among the most vocal opponents of globalization” (Mudde 184). The push back against globalization of radical right populist parties is centered around economic, cultural and political globalization.

Mudde then explains the rise of this right-wing mobilization. He proposes three different types of causes: Demand-side factors, external supply-side and internal supply side. Of demand-side factors, Mudde writes that, “it is evident that mass social changes like the ‘silent revolution’ and the development of multicultural societies (at least in Western Europe play a role, as do Hans-Georg Betz’s famous two movies, xenophobia and political resentment” (Mudde 229-230). However, he goes on to say that how these macro-level factors affect the behavior of individuals is understudied. Given that these factors largely affect Europe equally, the macro-level explanations cannot account for the varying levels of success of the populist radical right parties across Europe. Next, the external supply-side factors consist of the political opportunity structure of each country. Mudde says, “(t)hey explain not so much why parties will gain support from voters, but rather why this support does or does not lead to electoral



breakthrough and persistence” (Mudde 253). In other words, the political opportunity structure does not explain how macro-level demand-side factors translate into voter behavior, but rather whether support can translate into electoral success for emerging parties. Finally, internal supply-side factors are the different elements within the parties themselves. Few theoretical frameworks about populist radical right parties include a discussion of internal supply-side factors in their explanations. There are three key variables within the parties to explain electoral persistence: “party organization (including local implantation), party propaganda, and internal (practical) leadership.

Second, it is important to examine how right-wing and populist groups create narratives to drive support. In their paper, “How racism discourse can mobilize right-wing populism: The construction of identity and alliance in reactions to UKIP's Brexit ‘Breaking Point’ campaign”, Durrheim et. al. discuss how political leaders create these racist narratives and what happens when they are challenged, specifically using the example of the United Kingdom Independence Party's (UKIP) campaign to leave the European Union. In this article, the authors write, “we argue that controversially racist statements can be tools for mobilizing support. It works this way: Leaders make controversially racist statements; these statements are met with harsh criticism; and leaders and supporters claim victimization and the rhetorical high ground” (Durrheim et. al. 386). They go on to say that this tactic has been extremely successful throughout Europe and North America when coupled with a denial of racism. In this example, the leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage acts as the victim of those that criticized his party's “Breaking Point” campaign. The authors summarize their discursive analysis saying, “We have argued that the interactional functions of controversially racist arguments may be found in the tripolar

relations that they set up and maintain: between the controversially racist leader/party, the mainstream critics who represent the normative antiracism, and ordinary citizens who feel marginalized by the status quo and/or threatened by immigrants. Populist leaders know what kinds of arguments will attract the criticism of racism, and they are then able to use these accusations to build popular support” (Durrheim et. al. 401). A general description that the authors give of how politicians and political parties utilize this controversy is, “There is great political leverage to be had in promoting a successful version of racism. On the one hand, it allows leaders and their followers to apply the great weight of opprobrium against racism to forge personal and collective identity, explain social ills, and mobilize populations to action. On the other hand, counter accusations of racism, which rely on alternative definitions of the concept, can be used to rally support against the moral high ground that antiracist critics are seen to occupy” (Durrheim et. al. 402). These dynamics of controversy can be seen throughout Europe and North America surrounding debates about immigration and immigration policy.

### **Populist radical right parties in Spain**

Next, I will examine the literature about radical right parties in Spain, specifically. It is a topic that has not been widely studied, at least in part because Spain did not have a populist radical right party that had any electoral success until the 2018 regional elections in Andalucía. The three articles in this section are: “Spain: No Country for the Populist Radical Right?”, “Vox como representante de la derecha radical en España: un estudio sobre su ideología” and “Explaining the end of Spanish exceptionalism and electoral support for Vox”. These three articles will serve to illustrate the academic literature on the topic of populist radical right up to the present day and situate my thesis within the literature.

First, I will discuss “Spain: No Country for the Populist Radical Right?” by Sonia Alonso and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. Sonia Alonso is a professor at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser is a professor at Diego Portales University in Santiago de Chile and this article is one of the only scholarly articles written about populist radical right parties in Spain before the electoral emergence of Vox in 2018. The authors use the definition of populist radical right parties developed in *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* by Cas Mudde and much of his theoretical structure for the growth of populist radical right parties as well. The article was written before Vox had any legitimacy within Spain, so the article is an attempt by the authors to explain the lack of a populist radical right party in Spain. The article argues that there are three supply-side factors impeding the electoral breakthrough and persistence of a populist radical right party in Spain. These three factors are: the cleavage structure of the country, the strategy of competition of the mainstream right and the electoral system. The cleavage structure of the country is the lines across which the nation is divided politically. Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser argue that the existing cleavage structure of a country can obstruct the emergence of new populist radical right parties because, in general, these parties rely on politicizing issues that are not being addressed by the mainstream parties. In Spain, there are already existing political cleavages, not only along traditional, left-right economic lines, but also a central-periphery cleavage and divisions along the issues of immigration and nationalism. The authors argue that this makes it difficult for a far-right party to create a niche for themselves by politicizing a new issue. Lastly, the electoral system in Spain is another obstacle for populist radical right parties in the country.

Next, I will discuss “Vox como representante de la derecha radical en España: un estudio sobre su ideología” by Carles Ferreira. The article was published in November of 2019 and it details the ideology of Vox in relation with other parties in Europe and within Spain. The article says that ideology of Vox, “is based on a combination of nationalism and xenophobia (nativism) and an authoritarian view of society, attached to the values of law and order. This authoritarianism, however, represents neither the willingness to establish an autocratic regime nor the use of violence to reach political goals” (Ferreira 74). This article then, situates Vox in the party family of the populist radical right developed by Mudde. Ferreira goes on to detail how Spain has been one of the few European countries without a party on the far-right along with Portugal. It then describes the history of Vox starting with the first election in which Vox participated in 2014. The article then cites a meeting between many far-right political party leaders in Germany in 2017 as an inflection point for the party. Since that conference and a meeting with Steve Bannon, former chief strategist for President Trump, the ideology of Vox has become clearer. The article says, “(l)os temas que han puesto sobre la mesa para llegar a acuerdos coinciden plenamente con su discurso y propuestas de campaña: la derogación de las «leyes de género» y LGTBI, la defensa de la unidad de España, la rebaja de impuestos y el apoyo a la iniciativa empresarial, la lucha contra la inmigración ilegal o la protección de la cultura tradicional (Ferreira 78). These changes are accompanied by more success in the elections as the party gains more popular support within Spain.

Next, Ferreira attempts to define Vox as a populist radical right party by evaluating the party’s ideology with seven components: nationalism, nativism, authoritarianism, anti-democracy, populism, traditional values and neoliberalism. He defines each component as

either: central to the party's ideology, present but not central, indicated but not explicit or not present. The article defines nationalism as central to Vox's ideology and appears as support for a centralized state against the autonomous regions that currently exist in Spain and as support for Spanish at the detriment of Catalan, Basque and Galician. They define nativism as central as well. The article says, "La combinación de una posición *etnonacionalista* con un mensaje xenófobo es lo que convierte a Vox en una organización nativista (Ferreira 87). Next, it says that authoritarianism is also central to the party's ideology. They have a model of a society based on law and order. The article also says that there is no anti-democratic sentiment within the party's ideology, and that, like many other European populist radical right parties, Vox is pro-democracy and against the use of violence. Populism is indicated, but not explicitly by Vox. Ferreira writes, "El populismo como una ideología *finca* que contrasta un pueblo «puro» contra una élite corrupta no está casi presente en el discurso de Vox. La palabra «pueblo» no es mencionada nunca, en comparación con apelaciones constantes a «España» —más incluso que a «los españoles»— (Ferreira 90). This indicates that unlike many other, similar parties in Europe, Vox does not espouse populism as a central theme. Vox does, however, have traditional values as a central theme of its ideology. Finally, the topic of neopluralism is present, but not central to Vox. The central conclusion of the article is, "(a) través del análisis, mediante el método de la cadena causal, de siete características doctrinales —nacionalismo, nativismo, autoritarismo, antidemocracia, populismo, valores tradicionales y neoliberalismo— se han trazado las fronteras políticas de Vox y ha sido posible su clasificación como partido de ultraderecha, y más concretamente, de derecha radical (Ferreira 94).

Finally, I will discuss “Explaining the end of Spanish exceptionalism and electoral support for Vox” by Stuart J. Turnbull-Dugarte which was published in the Spring of 2019. It is one of the only scholarly articles that attempts to explain the rise of Vox in Spain. The article begins with a discussion of the context of Vox’s first electoral success in the regional elections of Andalusia in December of 2018, and then briefly describes the ideology of Vox. Turnbull-Dugarte then details the results of that election, showing that the only parties to gain support since the previous elections in 2015 were Vox and a center-right party, *Ciudadanos*. Next, Turnbull-Dugarte goes into his methods of analysis for determining the determining factors for why people voted for Vox. He concludes, “the results of the analysis here report that voters are driven to vote for Vox when they believe in reducing the independence of the country’s autonomous regions. It is, therefore, clear that the political conflict engendered by the Catalan question that drives Vox’s pro-Spanish and nationalist message is what attracts its supporters (Turnbull-Dugarte 7).

#### **4. Theoretical Approach**

##### **Imagined Communities**

In 1983, Benedict Anderson wrote a book called *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. In the book, Anderson lays out a framework to define a ‘nation’ and explain ‘nationalism’. He says that nationalism, itself, cannot be explained by Marxist or Liberal Theory. Anderson argues that nationalism is not an ideology like Marxism or Liberalism, but rather a concept closer to religion or kinship. He says that unlike most other ‘isms’, nationalism is philosophically impoverished and even incoherent (Anderson 5). Even

though nationalism as a concept is philosophically empty, it holds immense political power in the modern world.

Anderson defines the nation as, “an imagined community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 6). He goes on to explain each part of this definition. He writes, “(i)t is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6). Even though the members of the nation will never come into contact with all of the other members of that nation, they still conceive of themselves as connected. Second, the nation is limited because it cannot include everyone. The nation is defined by boundaries, and even though those boundaries are elastic, there are inherently people excluded from the nation. There is a defined other outside the imagined community that are purposefully left out. Nations are sovereign because they desire to be free of the control of any other entity. Even nations that conceive of themselves as under God desire to be directly so (Anderson 7). Finally, the nation is a community because, “regardless of the inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7). Even though there exists economic inequality within the nation, the nation conceives itself as horizontal, with each individual having the same amount of power. Many within the nation are willing to die for the imagined community in war.

Nations are largely concerned with mortality and creating a continuity in the world, similar to religion. People are willing to die for this concept because of the destiny of the nation. This is because the imagined community is rooted in culture. Anderson writes of nationalism that it

“invents nations where they do not exist” (Anderson 6). They root this nation in a shared history of the community to give the sense that the nation is extremely old and has a continuous, uniform history. In this same line of thinking, Anderson argues, “(i)f nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical’, the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny” (Anderson 11-12). This statement has to do with the fact that the nation considers itself to be permanent and uniform. Nationalism can be more appropriately defined as a way of understanding the world more similar to a religion than a self-consciously held political ideology.

## **5. Case Study**

I have chosen Vox as my case study because it is the first populist radical right political party to gain electoral support in Spain. The case of Spain is unique because, up until 2018, it was one of the only countries in Europe with no electoral support for any populist radical right parties. That changed when Vox won seats in the regional elections in the autonomous community in the south of Spain, Andalucía. They gained 11% of the votes, won 12 seats in the regional parliament and joined a right-wing coalition to create a regional government (Turnbull-Dugarte 1). This represented a shift because it was the first time any far-right entity had political power since the death of Francisco Franco in 1975 and the subsequent transition to democracy. Franco ruled the country as a dictator from 1939 until his death. This case study will focus on the dictatorship, specifically the imagined community of Spaniards that Franco created, followed by a descriptive history of far-right political parties in post-Franco Spain.



## Civil War

From 1936 to 1939, Spain was embroiled in a civil war. One side, led by General Francisco Franco was comprised mostly of right-wing political groups such as monarchists, fascists and much of the national army, was called the Nationalists (Richards and Elham 4). The other side of the war was the Republican army, comprised of left-wing political groups such as socialists, communists, anarchists and republicans. In their book, *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War*, Chris Elham and Michael Richards write, “(t)he devastating civil war of 1936-9 has long been seen as the defining moment of contemporary Spanish history, forming a vital part of Spain’s social and political inheritance” (Richards and Elham 2). During the war, around 350,000 were killed on the two sides. However, after the end of the civil war when the Francoist troops had won, about 500,000 people were forced to flee in exile, around 270,000 people were held in the new regime’s prisons and around 200,000 died of political repression, hunger and disease related to the conflict in the first years of the dictatorship (Elham and Richards 2-3). The conflict was a demonstration of the concept of “las dos Españas” that still exists and permeates Spanish political culture to this day (Pichel). The divide was perpetuated by the narratives created by the Franco regime concerning Spanish national identity and what it means to be Spanish. They were able to create these narratives because, “(u)nlike (Italian) fascism and Nazism... the Franco regime was neither militarily nor politically defeated at the end of the war. In the early decades the Spanish dictatorship sought legitimation on the basis of its triumph – the Nationalist ‘crusade’ became the principal founding myth of Franco’s ‘New State’” (Elham and Richards 3).

## Francoist Narratives

Narratives of Spanish identity were perpetuated by state-controlled media and rigid state control of schools. “A particular narrative of the Christian *Reconquista* of Spain from Islam, beginning in the eighth century and culminating in the Moorish and Jewish ‘purifications’ of the fifth century, was forever replayed” (Elham and Richards 5). The sentiment of a return to a past version of Spain comes from the foundation of the fascist party, Falange Española or Falange. Falange was founded in 1933 by José Antonio Primo de Rivera and was adopted as the party of Francisco Franco. In the founding document of Falange, Primo de Rivera wrote the desires of his new party. They included, “(q)ue todos los pueblos en España, por diversos que sean, se sientan armonizados en una irrevocable unidad de destino” (Primo de Rivera 106) and, “que España recobre resueltamente el sentido universal de su cultura y su Historia” (Primo de Rivera 106). The fervent nationalism expressed in these desires was the basis for the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in which the Falangists played a large role. Primo de Rivera was arrested before the civil war broke out, and upon the start of the civil war, the Republicans executed thousands of members of the Falange party that were being held in Republican zones (Payne 210). In November of 1936, the republican government executed Primo de Rivera for his role in the attempted coup. During the time Primo de Rivera was imprisoned, Franco took over the political agenda of Falange and along with being the military leader of the Nationalists, also became its political head.

In 1939, the Nationalist troops officially won the war and Franco’s victory was confirmed. In his book, *Fascism in Spain 1923-1977*, Stanley G. Payne writes, “Franco's total victory in the Civil War determined two issues. The first was the complete defeat of liberalism and the left, whether in the form of the largely democratic Republic of 1931-1936 or the

revolutionary regime of 1936-1939. The second was the certification of the personal power and authority of Franco himself, who now had the most extensive jurisdiction of any ruler in the history of Spain, and was at that moment the most formally or theoretically unchecked authority in Europe” (Payne 310). The consolidation of Franco’s power involved incorporating all of the different groups on the right that fought in the war, the monarchists, the political Catholics and the member of Falange (Payne 311).

After Franco was able to consolidate his power, he refocused on creating narratives of Spanish national identity and what it meant to be Spanish. First, the regime used imagery of the Baroque Spain and of ‘hispanidad’ to construct these narratives. ‘Hispanidad’ is a word loosely used to describe countries and communities that share the Spanish language and some Spanish culture. According to Johannes Großmann in his article, “‘Baroque Spain’ As Metaphor. Hispanidad, Europeanism and Cold War Anti-Communism in Francoist Spain”, ‘hispanidad’ served as a triple metaphor. First, it was a metaphor for, “the soul of the Spanish nation, for national unity, national uniqueness and national reputation” (Großmann 756). Next, ‘hispanidad’ was used as a stand-in for the idea of Catholic mission and Counter-Reformation used to draw a connection from the *Reconquista* to anti-communism and anti-liberalism employed by the Franco regime. Under this idea, the regime constructed the republican forces as heretics and materialists and portrayed themselves as the protectors of Catholicism and tradition (Großmann 756). Finally, it was used to represent, “the golden age of Spanish history as an influential European power and the first transatlantic Empire, and for Spain’s cultural, ideological and racial connections with ‘Hispanoamérica’” (Großmann 756). Franco used the conceptions of ‘hispanidad’ to define his regime as a return to an era when Spain had

tremendous geopolitical power and also to define an 'us' and a 'them'. The regime and its supporters were defined as the noble, righteous defenders of God's destiny for Spain, while those on the left were actively working against it and therefore anti-Spanish. The idea of a return to the Baroque was used to create an imagined community of people within Spain that believed that they were true Spaniards that fought against the evils of the Republican forces. In her article, "Shaping women: national identity through the use of language in Franco's Spain", Mercedes Carbayo-Abengózar says, "(t)he baroque discourse is one based on authoritarianism as opposed to liberalism, Catholic principles as opposed to non-Catholic ones, and is focused on keeping one's own traditions as opposed to being open to new ideas" (Carbayo-Abengózar 77).

In addition to the baroque ideas pushed by Franco's regime, they also created narratives surrounding Spanish women and their role within society. Franco even created a division within Falange called *la Sección femenina* specifically to control women. Carbayo-Abengózar writes that, "(t)he image of new women for the new Spain was a contradictory image in itself in the sense that it was supposed to be new but it was in fact based on 'old', traditional, exclusive, religious and patriotic values" (Carbayo-Abengózar 82). *La Sección femenina* based their idea of femininity on purity that included the pure Catholicism and exclusivity of the Spanish race. The focus on women was, in part, to be able to control the minds of the children in Spanish society. The mother was incredibly important for the Franco regime because she could install the falangist rhetoric into her children and raise the next generation. Sexuality for the women under the Franco regime was to be repressed and to repress sexuality was the highest form of respect (Carbayo-Abengózar 84). The Spanish femininity was also defined in opposition to the liberal definition of femininity in the rest of Europe and as specifically tied to Spanish

nationality. The women of Spain were at once excluded from many parts of public life and given enormous responsibility. "The burden or representation for Spanish women of Francoism consisted of an enormous responsibility... the creation of a new image of women, the control of sexual desire, the maintenance of a pure, clean and Christian society and finally the physical and ideological reproduction of new heroes" (Carbayo Abengózar 86). This strict control and imposition of identity upon Spanish women played a large role in Franco's effort to narrativize the Spanish people and create an imagined community.

The final way that Franco created national identity in Spain is the rejection of the delegation of powers to the regions of Spain that perceive themselves as historically and culturally different. The most prominent of these regions are Catalonia and the Basque Country, but also include, to a lesser extent, Galicia and several other regions. The regime's attacks on the cultures and languages of the regions were carried out in a number of ways. First, the regime eliminated all of the regional statutes for the Basque country and Catalonia bringing them under uniform central administration (Payne 231). The Basque and Catalanian language were banned from religious services, courts and publication and citizens were told they must speak the language of the empire. In an effort to present Spain as a culturally homogenous nation, the regime did not allow the teaching of any other languages besides Spanish in schools and Spanish was the only language spoken outside the home. This repression of regional identity was just another way that Franco created 'others' within the Spanish nation that were not completely Spanish. All of this was done to make Spain "Una, Grande y Libre".

### **Post-Franco Era**

Upon Franco's death in 1975, Spain began a very complicated transition to democracy. The first democratic election since the beginning of the dictatorship took place and the new constitution was ratified in the following year. The Spanish transition to democracy is often seen as the "model" for this kind of transition because there was no violence between the two sides during the transition (Edles 14). Many of the institutions from Franco's regime remained in place such as the courts, but the transitional and future democratic governments recognized universal suffrage, political pluralism and popular sovereignty. Both sides of the country came together during the transition to create a new, democratic Spain.

After the transition to democracy, there was still an extreme right in Spain. It was represented by the party *Fuerza nueva*. The discourse of *Fuerza nueva* remained virtually identical to that of Franco during the dictatorship. The party still maintained the idea that the state should be a catholic state that there were enemies within the country that were anti-Spain, that the Civil War was a religious crusade and still espoused the ideas of *Hispanidad* (Casals 130). In the general election of 1977, *Fuerza nueva* ran as the head of a coalition called *Alianza nacional*, which only gained 0.3% of the vote. *Fuerza nueva* was never able to gain significant electoral support because they still espoused authoritarian ideas and did not accept the transition to democracy that was extremely popular with the Spanish people. The electoral failure of *Fuerza nueva* led to its dissolution in 1982. Over the course of the next two decades, there were several attempts to create a far-right party in Spain, none of which gained any electoral success. The ideological values of the far-right always existed in Spain as evidenced by several magazines such as *Mundo NS*, *La Peste Negra*, and *Disidencias* which led a critical examination of Spanish politics from a far-right perspective (Casals 136). Casals also writes of

this period, “there was a simultaneous revival in militancy, as a new generation of activists raised and educated during the democracy for whom nostalgia for Franco was a minor issue broke out onto the political scene” (Casals 137). More recently, towards the end of the 1990s there was a schism between Falangist parties that were still authoritarian and newer national-populist groups similar to those coming to prominence in the rest of Europe, such as *Front national* led by Jean-Marie Le Pen. In 2003, a new party called *Alternativa española* emerged that attempted to align the two factions. Their slogan is “For life, for the family, for Christian roots, for Spain”. Although *Alternativa española* used much of the didactic rhetoric of Le Pen, it is still considered neo-Francoist and the heir to *Fuerza nueva* (Rodríguez Jiménez). After 2003, several off-shoots of the Spanish far-right have appeared in the autonomous regions of Spain. Most notably, *Plataforma per Catalunya*, a party that was mainly focused on immigration. *Plataforma per Catalunya* ran in two elections for the Catalan Parliament in 2010 and 2012 and never gained a seat. The next party of any importance on far-right of Spanish politics was the subject of this thesis, Vox.

### **Vox Narratives and Ideology**

Santiago Abascal, along with several others, founded Vox in 2013. The party ran for the first time in the European parliamentary elections of 2014. Vox gained 1.56% of the vote in that election but did not gain a single seat. That was Vox’s best result for the next 4 years. In that time, Vox ran in 6 elections, including two general elections, and never gained more than .62% of the vote. The electoral success of Vox began in the regional elections in Andalucía in 2018, in which Vox gained 10.97% of the vote and 12 of the 109 seats in the regional parliament. Vox joined a coalition government in the wake of the 2018 regional election with two other, more

mainstream, conservative parties, *Partido Popular* and *Ciudadanos*. After the 2018 regional election, Vox kept their electoral momentum, running in several more elections at all levels of Spanish governance including 2 general elections. In the general elections of 2019, Vox gained over 2.6 million votes and 10.26% of the votes. With that electoral success, Vox became well-represented at the national level with 24 of the 350 seats in parliament.

Vox positioned itself as a political outsider in Spain that challenged the existing parties and government. As I have outlined above, Vox is a member of the populist radical right, but refuses the description of radical right. In its foundational manifest Vox says, “España atraviesa una crisis múltiple y profunda de carácter sistémico que afecta a su economía, a sus instituciones, a su unidad nacional y a su moral colectiva” (Manifiesto Fundacional 2). Vox claims that the systematic crisis is a failure that stems from the corruption within the Spanish government. Vox’s asserts that the Spanish government has broken down the traditional principles within Spanish society and politics since the end of the Franco regime. Their goal, as defined by the founder and president of the party, Santiago Abascal, is, “*Hacer España grande otra vez*” (Gran acto de Vox en Vistalegre 8:17), adopted from the campaign of US President Donald Trump in 2016. The overall discourse of Vox reflects their rejection of ‘political correctness’. They refer to the mainstream right as “*la derechita cobarde*” and assert that they represent the true feelings of those on the right of the political spectrum in Spain. Vox calls their supporters *la España viva* saying that these people have always existed in Spain, even though those in power work against them and they have fought for their beliefs. Abascal said, “La España viva tiene su genio, tiene su pueblo, tiene su rey, y, ahora, España tiene Vox” (Gran acto de Vox en Vistalegre 1:41:34).



First, the most important issue for Vox is the national identity of Spain. Vox believes in a unitary conception of Spain and is completely against the delegation of power from the national government to the autonomous regions. In “*100 medidas para la España Viva*”, a list of 100 changes that Vox would like to see in Spain, Vox calls for suspension of the autonomy of Catalonia until those who supported and caused the attempted secession of the region from Spain have been brought to justice and the defeat of the underlying problem (100 medidas para la España Viva 2). They also call for the illegalization of parties that pursue “la destrucción de la unidad territorial de la Nación y su soberanía” (100 medidas para la España Viva). In addition to the reform of who holds power in Spain, Vox also requests the legal protection of the national symbols of Spain including the flag, the national anthem and the crown. Similarly, they say, “Ninguna administración ni particular puede menospreciar la lengua común de todos, el español. Mucho menos discriminarla. Hay que cumplir estrictamente el mandato constitucional de que todos los españoles tienen derecho a utilizar el español, y el deber de conocerlo” (100 medidas para la España Viva 2). Their program of nationalism also includes an integral plan for the recognition, diffusion and protection of the national identity and the contributions of Spain to civilization and global history with special recognition of Spain’s national heroes (100 medidas para la España Viva 3). Vox positions itself as the defender of Spanish nationalism saying to its supporters, “estáis aquí para defender su patria” (Gran acto de Vox en Vistalegre).

While the other parties in Spain define the foundation of Spanish identity as the constitution of 1978, Vox uses the foundational myths of the discovery of America and the *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula by the Catholic monarchs to define the beginning of Spanish identity and unity (Ferreira 87). Vox asks for the striking of la Ley de la Memoria

Histórica. Their justification is that no parliament has the authority to define the country's shared past or exclude Spaniards whose views of the past are different. They accuse the government of using the past to divide the people and say that rather than that the country must pay tribute together to all of those who "fought for Spain" (100 medidas para la España Viva). Vox started their campaign for the 2019 general election in Covadonga, a town of less than 100 people that is sometimes referred to as the 'cradle of Spain' because it was the site of the first victory of the Christian kings of Hispania over the Muslim rulers of the Iberian Peninsula at the beginning of the *Reconquista* (Loucaides and Jannessari). This was a clear message to its supporters that Vox recognizes Spain as a Catholic nation that has its origins in the *Reconquista*.

Like many other populist radical right parties, Vox takes a strong stance on immigration policy and an even stronger rhetorical stance. Vox proposes the immediate deportation of all undocumented immigrants in Spain and the elimination of the possibility that a person who enters Spain illegally can make their residency legal (100 medidas para la España Viva 5). The party also wants to institute a policy that would make citizenship more difficult to obtain through language and integration standards and create a, "(p)osibilidad de perder la nacionalidad adquirida por actividades contra la soberanía, seguridad o independencia nacional (100 medidas para la España Viva 5). There is an explicit focus on the integration of immigrants that reflects the desire for a homogenous society in terms of language, culture and religion.

The next series of policies are national defense and border security policies and the rhetoric that accompanies them. A large and important section of these policies concerns Islamic extremism, a topic used by many populist radical right parties to elicit fear in their

supporter base. Vox calls for the closing of any fundamentalist mosque and the deportation of imams that promote various extremist ideas. Moreover, Vox implicates all Muslims living in Spain saying, “(e)xigir a los responsables de la religión islámica en España una absoluta colaboración para la detección de radicales. Exclusión de la enseñanza del Islam en la escuela pública” (100 medidas para la España Viva). By not allowing the teaching of Islam in schools, Vox asserts that there is an inherent connection between Islam and violent extremism. They also propose the building of a wall around the cities of Melilla and Ceuta, two Spanish enclaves on the African side of the Mediterranean Sea in Morocco. In *100 medidas para la España Viva*, Vox specifically requests that nationality and nation of birth be published in crime statistics. In terms of foreign policy, Vox wants to suspend the Schengen area agreement and for Spain to participate in military actions against “la amenaza yihadista de acuerdo a nuestros intereses y capacidades” (100 medidas para la España Viva). Also, not related to specific policy, members of Vox use fiercely islamophobic rhetoric. In 2019, prosecutors investigated Javier Ortega Smith, an influential member of Vox for hate speech. At a Vox rally in Valencia he said, “our common enemy, the enemy of Europe, the enemy of progress, the enemy of democracy, the enemy of family, the enemy of life, the enemy of the future is called the Islamist invasion” (González).

The economic ideology of Vox is clearly neoliberal as discussed by Carles Ferreira, but it is not central to their overall ideology (Ferreira 91). Often times, Vox’s neoliberal policies appear within nationalistic rhetoric. The economic policies of Vox are mostly focused on the lowering of taxes and reducing regulation of industry. Vox also has a plan to reform the Spanish education system. That plan involves making all teaching in Spanish rather than the regional languages around Spain (100 medidas para la España Viva 15). The party also wants to give the

parents of each child more power to choose whether each student will participate in activities that involve ethics, social values, civic morals or sexual content.

One of Vox's strongest positions is on the topic they call "*vida y familia*", which includes protection of the traditional family, abortion and *Ley de la violencia de género*. Vox calls for, "*Derogación ley de violencia de género y de toda norma que discrimine a un sexo de otro. En su lugar, promulgar una ley de violencia intrafamiliar que proteja por igual a ancianos, hombres, mujeres y niños*" (100 medidas para la España viva 17). *Ley de violencia de género* is a law to combat violence against women and assist the victims of gender violence and was passed in 2004. Vox says that radical feminism is responsible for laws such as this that target men. In an article from March of 2020, a representative of Vox, Carla Toscano said, "*el castigo sistemático del hombre, sea inocente o no –aunque para el feminismo el hombre nunca es inocente- a través de una fuerte e incasable compañía de demonización*" (VOX pide sustuir la Ley de la violencia de género por una de violencia intrafamiliar). Vox says that these laws discriminate against men and should be replaced by a law that protects all of the members of the family equally. Vox also supports the "*familia natural*". They propose the foundation of a ministry of the family, the official recognition of the "*familia natural*" by the State and the support for large families through monetary incentives (100 medidas para la España viva). Vox is against abortion and says that pregnant women should have access to information about alternatives and assistance.

In the section labeled, *Libertades y justicia*, Vox lays out its plan for the justice system and remembrance of victims of terrorism. In terms of public finance, they want to end public money going to ideological organizations and political parties. The party proposed *Ley de*

*memoria dignidad y justicia para las víctimas del terrorismo* to honor victims of separatist and Islamist terrorism and the creation of monument to the victims of terrorism. This seems to be in direct conflict with their fierce opposition to the *Ley de la memoria histórica* about the Spanish Civil War and Francoism. They want to restore the rigor of the punishments for acts of terrorism and “(r)ecuperar la soberanía nacional en la aplicación de las sentencias de nuestros tribunals” (*100 medidas para la España viva* 21). This is powerful rhetoric about how Spain has lost its sovereignty and ability to fight those who oppose the State and oppose Spain. They are specifically concerned about the acts of Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA or Basque Homeland and Freedom). ETA is a terrorist group based in the Basque country that fights for the independence from Spain. They were particularly active in the later years of the Franco dictatorship and the early years of democracy.

## 6. Analysis

In the years after the death of Franco, radical right populist parties rose to prominence across Europe. Scholars consider the French party, Front national as the prototype for populist radical right parties was founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen and its best result in a national election came in 1997. Populist radical right parties in Austria, Germany, Belgium, Denmark and across Eastern Europe succeeded in the decades following the death of Franco in Spain. During this time, there was no successful populist radical right party in Spain. However, this is not because of any demand-side factors. As Mudde explains, there are several demand-side factors that can influence whether a populist radical right party can have success. These demand side

factors include modernization, ethnic backlash, authoritarian legacy, and micro-level populist radical right attitudes.

As for the more macro-level factors, Spain either experienced the same phenomena or more extreme phenomena than the rest of Western Europe. Spain's modernization happened very quickly after the death of Franco. The ethnic backlash category is the idea that populist radical right parties find success in response to an "ethnic threat" such as a large increase in immigration. Spain had a very large increase in immigration, "at the end of the 1990s, no more than two percent of the population were foreign-born legal residents, this number had risen to 12 percent by 2013 (Alonso and Kaltwasser 30). Spain certainly has an authoritarian legacy, as shown throughout this thesis and that authoritarian legacy is more recent than most of the rest of Western Europe. Finally, as Alonso and Kaltwasser write, "There is abundant empirical evidence demonstrating that during this time Spanish citizens were no more – or necessarily less – tolerant than their Western European brethren. According to the European Social Survey (ESS) in 2006, the year in which immigration figured as the main problem in Spain for a majority of Spaniards (59 per cent), when asked whether immigrants from other races or ethnic groups should be allowed to enter the country 13 per cent of Spaniards declared that many should be allowed to and 15 per cent answered that none should be" (Alonso and Kaltwasser 31). Anti-immigration sentiment demonstrates both that Spain had the demand-side conditions for a populist radical right party and that the imagined community of those that believe in a pure, catholic Spain still exists. There is also evidence that Spain had a similar or higher level of populist skepticism of democratic institutions as the rest of Europe, particularly since the economic depression that began in 2008 (Alonso and Kaltwasser 31). Finally, in the category of

authoritarianism, or law and order attitudes, Spain consistently shows high levels of authoritarian attitudes. According to a Community Innovation Survey (CIS), a biannual survey conducted by the European Union, “(when) questioned about what things had got worse since the Francoist dictatorship, 62 per cent of Spaniards agreed that insecurity and crime were among them; 81 per cent mentioned the problems associated with drug trafficking and consumption and another 83 per cent selected terrorism. Moreover, 43 per cent of Spaniards believed that people in Spain were less respectful of authority than during Francoism” (Alonso and Kaltwasser 33). These statistics show a clear bias towards authoritarian attitudes within the Spanish people that should indicate favorable conditions for a populist radical right party.

The article by Alonso and Kaltwasser was written in 2015, before the electoral emergence of Vox. They concluded that the reason that a populist radical right party had not succeeded in Spain was the supply-side factors. They said that the cleavage structure of the country is the reason that no populist radical right party had succeeded in an election. While the article offers many great insights, Vox proved that conclusion to be incorrect. It has not been the demand-side factors introduced by Cas Mudde. As I have shown, the demand-side factors were present during the three decades that no representative of the populist radical right had success in Spain. It was not the supply-side factors either. As shown by Alonso and Kaltwasser, those same factors existed in 2015. And while the supply-side factors such as the cleavage structure and the electoral system of Spain are not beneficial to the emergence of a populist radical right party in Spain, those factors did not change before Vox’s first electoral success in 2018. As mentioned in the Literature Review, Turnbull-Dugarte attributes the rise of Vox to the response to the push for independence in Catalonia. While this conflict is certainly a

factor and is a salient part of the messaging of Vox, center versus periphery conflict has been present in Spain for the entire duration of the democracy. Regional nationalism is pervasive in Spanish politics. Large independence movements exist in several regions in Spain and existed long before Vox's electoral success in 2018. So, while this increased push for independence in Catalonia certainly played a role in Vox's success, it cannot fully explain the rise of the party.

### **How Franco Created an Imagined Community**

Franco created an imagined community in Spain by creating a narrow definition of Spanish identity and pushing that narrative on the Spanish people. The imagined community of people that believe in Franco's vision of Spain fits all of the criteria that Benedict Anderson discussed in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. First, the community is imagined. All of the people in Spain that believe in this idea of Spanish destiny will never meet or know one another, yet they believe they fight for the same cause and that unifies them. The community is also limited because there are clearly defined boundaries. The community obviously excludes those outside of Spain, but there are also many people within Spain that do not fit into the imagined community. As Carbayo-Abengózar explained, the regime preached 'baroque' values of authoritarianism over liberalism and Catholic values over anti-Catholic Values (Carbayo-Abengózar 77). Franco's regime also pushed the value of purity that encompassed exclusivity, unity and virginity. The regime labeled those that worked against that cultural narrative as anti-Spain. Franco's imagined community was also sovereign. Even though Franco was the leader of the community, they believed that God directly led Spain to its destiny. This is also evidenced by the isolationist policy of Franco during the early years of the regime. Finally, the people that identified with this Spanish identity were a community because



they believed that they shared the same values, beliefs and heritage. The fierce Spanish nationalism that Franco created is much more like a religion than an ideology as Anderson described. Carbayo-Abengózar writes that, “(t)he baroque culture that characterised the Francoist period was a conservative culture, manipulative, traditional, superstitious and religious, based upon concepts of eternity, universality and the divine right of rule” (Carbayo-Abengózar 89). The eternity of Spain was a powerful discourse that was very effective in unifying people.

Upon Franco’s death 1975, thousands gathered in Madrid and throughout Spain to mourn. He was buried in Valle de los caídos, a monument to the nationalists killed during the Civil War. He was buried alongside José Antonio Primo de Rivera in a place of respect in the monument. That community that Franco created while he ruled Spain still existed when he died. Those supporters attempted forming the parties that I discussed in the immediate aftermath of the transition to democracy, but those parties did not gain support because of their rejection of democracy. Nonetheless, a large section of the population still held dear the values that the regime espoused. Catholicism, traditional values, the belief that women should stay in the domestic space and a conception of Spain that started with the *Reconquista* were prevalent among the right in Spain. There were political parties that represented these values, however there were wildly unsuccessful because the far-right was incredibly divided. Additionally, most Falangist parties at the time opposed the transition to democracy, which was overwhelmingly popular with the Spanish people. In fact, the two most centrist parties that oversaw the transition to democracy gained over 63% of the vote, while a coalition that made up all of the parties allied against the transition to democracy gained only .53% of the vote. The

election was a clear rejection of dictatorship, even though the Francoist values still existed within the population. The magazines mentioned in the Case Study section, *Mundo NS*, *La Peste Negra*, and *Disidencias*, kept their readers supplied with far-right, neo-Francoist ideas. It is clear that neo-Francoist views lived on in Spain well after the death of Franco and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Rodríguez Jiménez 117). Groups on the extreme right keep the historical memory of fascism, Franco and the civil war alive through political events such as 20-N. 20-N is an annual event on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November that commemorates the death of Francisco Franco and José Antonio Primo de Rivera where supporters of Franco march from the *Parque del Oeste* in Madrid to the *Valle de los Caídos* (Rodríguez Jiménez 117). They celebrate a mass to mourn the deaths of the two icons of the far-right. Similar events are held on October 12<sup>th</sup> that commemorate the discovery of America and the cultural unity of the Hispanic world. Events like these demonstrate the continued support for Franco and the ideas about identity pushed by the regime.

### **How Vox Captured the Community**

Vox tapped into the imagined community that Franco created by using similar narratives about Spanish identity and the foundation of the Spanish nation. Like the regime of Franco, Vox rose out of what they define as a crisis for Spain. For Franco, that crisis was the *Segunda república española* and the Spanish Civil War and for Vox, the crisis is years of corruption and decentralization of the State. Vox's methods of resolving the crisis mirror the cultural agenda of Franco. The motto, *hacer España grande otra vez*, is a clear reference to the belief that Spain was once great and is no longer and that Spain must return to the traditional values of the past. Vox's discourse about eliminating the special privileges and powers delegated to autonomous

zones also calls back to Franco's idea of a strong, unified Spain. It speaks to the Spanish people, many of whom believe that independence movements are the largest problems facing the country (Turnbull-Dugarte 5). Vox calls for the legal protection and glorification of the national symbols of the flag and the crown. Those same symbols were important for Franco in his effort to evoke extreme nationalism in the country. Additionally, Franco eliminated the official use of any language other than Spanish to promote the ideas of a pure, uniform Spain. Vox asserts that since the death of Franco, the autonomous regions and the left destroyed the place that Spanish held in the country and they want to return Spanish to its place as the language of all of Spain.

Vox uses the same tactics and narratives as Franco to create an 'other' within Spain. Their demonization of Islam as a religion that encourages terrorism is rooted in their narrative of Spain as beginning with the *Reconquista* from the Muslim rulers of Spain. Beginning their elections in Covadonga represents that view to their supports and mirrors Franco's narratives about the origins of Spain. Through this narrative, Vox makes the Muslims living in Spain not part of the Spanish nation because of the origin story of the nation. They further this othering through policy proposals such as the removal of all illegal immigrants from Spain immediately and banning the teaching of Islam in schools. Vox is working for the same notion of a pure and homogenous Catholic Spain that Franco worked towards during his time in power. Vox also defends Franco's position on the Civil War. During the Franco regime, the Nationalists were glorified as martyrs in a holy crusade and Vox's fight against the *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* defends that view of history saying that both sides fought for Spain. Moreover, Vox uses the same narratives about family and traditional values that Franco did. Vox fights for the

conception of a traditional family with many children and women staying home to raise the children. That same idea of the family was Franco's vision for the ideal Catholic Spain. Through the *Sección femenina*, Franco encouraged women to be the caretakers in the home and pass on the national-Catholic values to their children. Vox's fight against feminism through their campaigns to destroy the *Ley de la violencia de género* is based on this same conception of the role of women in society. Through these narratives, Vox has accessed the community of people within Spain that held these values, but never had a party truly speak for them, since the death of Franco.

## 7. Conclusion

I argue that the reason that Vox has had electoral success is not because of demand-side factors, not because of supply-side factors and not simply because of the heightened push for independence in Catalonia, but rather because Vox is the first party, since the death of Franco, to tap into the imagined community that Franco created. Vox used the same narratives and created the same base as Franco. The ultra-Catholic, conservative Spain that Franco cultivated are the same people that support the reforms of Vox. Vox accepted democracy and at the same time campaigned on reforms that would make Spain look more like it did under the control of Francisco Franco, and in doing so, gained the support of the same community that supported him. As the response to the proposal for the exhumation of Franco's body has shown, his spirit is still alive and well within the Spanish population.

This conclusion not only has an effect on politics in Spain, but also the collective memory of the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship. The struggle over the *Ley de la memoria*

*histórica* is evidence that there is unresolved tension concerning how the country should remember this period in their history and the suffering between fellow countrymen. This imagined community of people in the country that believe that they are the true patriots defending the *Patria* and that there are large groups of people working against Spain, dangerously creates an extreme mentality that could lead to violence. The extreme rhetoric of Vox, the use of the narrative of the civil war as a holy crusade, and the othering of groups within Spain are signs of a return of fascism to the country.

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