

Vox in Spain: Ideological Struggles and the Iberosphere Strategy

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1. Introduction

The rise of Vox in the Spanish political landscape represents a significant case study within the broader context of the European radical and far right. While the party shares common features with other far-right movements – such as nationalism, anti-immigration rhetoric, and a strong emphasis on law and order – it also displays distinct ideological and strategic traits. Vox's discourse is deeply rooted in Spanish national identity and presents the party as a defender of traditional values against progressive and separatist forces. This particular blend of populism and nationalism has enabled Vox to carve out a space for itself both within Spain's right-wing political ecosystem and on the international stage.

Despite its electoral limitations compared to other European far-right parties, Vox has achieved notable international influence beyond Spain's borders. The party has actively sought to consolidate ties with like-minded political actors across Europe and the Americas, taking advantage of events such as CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) – where Vox's leader delivered a widely discussed speech in the 2025 edition – creating platforms like the 'Madrid Forum,' and sponsoring initiatives such as the so-called "Iberosphere Summits." Moreover, the recent appointment of Santiago Abascal as president of the European parliamentary group 'The Patriots' – instead of more prominent figures such as Viktor Orbán, Marine Le Pen, or even Matteo Salvini¹ – highlights Vox's growing political and strategic rel-

1 It is important to note that within the European parliamentary group 'The Patriots,' the parties that achieved the best results in the June 2024 European elections were France's 'Rassemblement National' – which contributed 30 MEPs – Hungary's 'Fidesz' with 12, and Italy's 'Lega' with 8 seats. The Spanish party ranks fifth: behind Austria's FPÖ in terms of number of representatives, and behind the Dutch PVV in percentage of the vote (Patriots.eu. (n.d.). *Parties*. Retrieved April 20, 2025, from <https://patriots.eu/parties/>). From this perspective, it would have seemed more logical for one of the leaders of these parties to assume the presidency of the group rather than Santiago Abascal.

evance on the international scene. One of the central hypotheses of this chapter is that Vox's international projection stems from its emerging role as a bridge or point of connection among different poles of the global far right.

Beyond its international influence, Vox is notable for promoting a form of nativism that slightly diverges from the canonical definition proposed by Cas Mudde (2017). The Spanish party expands the boundaries of the native in-group to include populations from the country's former colonies. Thus, while maintaining a firmly nativist and fiercely anti-Muslim vision of the Spanish nation, Santiago Abascal's party embraces a form of "Ethnic Hispanism" that recognizes Colombians, Venezuelans, Argentinians, Cubans, and Mexicans as potential compatriots (Sanahuja & López Burian, 2022).

This proposal of an "expanded nativism" is built upon the development of a new concept: the 'Iberosphere.' Inspired by the term 'Anglosphere,' this neologism aspires to establish a geopolitical and cultural community that encompasses all Spanish-speaking nations in Latin America, while also including Brazil. In this regard, the 'Iberosphere'-project has both a political-strategic dimension and a broader geopolitical one. The former is tied to the desire to unify conservative political parties and movements across Latin America in order to counteract the ideological and legislative agenda of progressive governments and institutions in the region (Fernández-Vázquez, 2024). The latter aims to reinforce the political and economic presence of Spain and the United States in the area, in response to the growing influence of China. This notion of a transatlantic right-wing alliance, framed through narratives of cultural and historical ties – and marked by a clear geopolitical orientation – represents a departure from the traditional narratives of the European far right, which have primarily focused on national sovereignty and intra-European alliances (Forti, 2024).

Nonetheless, despite the relative consolidation of the 'Iberosphere'-project, several open questions remain. First, it is unclear what role the former African and Asian colonies of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns are meant to play in this initiative. Second, the involvement of Portugal in the project remains uncertain, particularly regarding the level of commitment of the Portuguese far right represented by Chega. Third, more research is needed on how this concept has been received by the emerging right-wing movements in Latin America. Specifically, it is important to examine to what extent these new parties and leaders embrace the notion of the 'Iberosphere' and how they interpret it.

Finally, the emergence of new summits and meeting spaces, along with growing coordination among far-right forces on both sides of the Atlantic, calls for closer examination of how these parties and movements operate beyond their national contexts. In this regard, it is analytically crucial to map the circulation of ideas as well as the interactions among political formations – particularly those that systematically participate in specific forums. The calendar of far-right summits and events has

become so extensive and dense that an average leader of any European party could easily spend half the year traveling from one event to another. No other ideological family currently exhibits a comparable level of transnational activity.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, it reviews the main theoretical explanations that may account for the parliamentary breakthrough of Spain's far right in 2019 – rather than during the height of the economic crisis or the refugee crisis. Second, it delves into the explicitly metapolitical character that the party has embraced from its inception. This reflective stance is relatively novel within the European far right and makes it possible to connect conceptual creations such as the so-called 'Iberosphere' with ideological outcomes such as 'Ethnic Hispanism.'

2. Understanding Vox's Parliamentary Breakthrough

The history of Vox has been recounted on numerous occasions. For this reason, it is worth highlighting three key details that help situate the party in its proper context. First, like Germany's 'Alternative für Deutschland,' Vox was founded in 2013 (Porto-Artal, 2024). Second, its origin resembles that of parties such as Chega in Portugal, AfD in Germany, or Fratelli d'Italia in Italy: Vox emerged as a right-wing splinter from the main Christian democratic party (Lerín, 2022). Third, the Spanish formation belongs to the group of far-right parties that arose during the 2010s, alongside others like 'Reconquête' in France, *Chega* in Portugal, or 'Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor' in Romania (Ferreira, 2019). These three features position Vox as a "normal" party within the European far-right family, albeit one that appeared relatively late. Led by Santiago Abascal, Vox remains a relative newcomer to this ideological constellation, though it already occupies a prominent position on the international stage.

Vox's emergence in the Spanish political landscape, however, presents some specific features. Most notably, its electoral success is not directly linked to the effects of the 2008 financial crisis or the eurozone crisis. In this sense, it is difficult to explain the party's rise through the lens of so-called 'grievance theories,' which emphasize 'economic insecurity' (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) resulting from processes of economic modernization (Betz, 1994). From this perspective, Vox cannot be considered the party of the 'losers of globalization' (Rydgren, 2007). In fact, various academic studies have shown that, at the time of its entry into Parliament in 2019, its electorate did not come from the most disadvantaged sectors of society, but primarily from the middle and upper-middle classes (Rama et al., 2021).

In the case of Spain, the political formations that initially capitalized on the social unrest triggered by the 2008 economic crisis were 'Podemos' and, later, 'Ciudadanos.' It can therefore be argued that the 'losers of austerity' and those affected by the policies implemented in Spain following the eurozone crisis did not turn to

populist far-right options such as Vox, but rather to new populist left-wing parties and, to a lesser extent, to other actors characterized by a discourse of democratic renewal and reform (Fernández-Albertos, 2015). Indeed, until the general election of April 2019, Vox had never surpassed 1% of the vote in any nationwide contest (Rodríguez-Teruel, 2021). In short, although it was formally established in December 2013, Vox remained a marginal force throughout both the most acute years of the economic crisis and the subsequent crisis of the two-party system and the broader transformation of Spain's party landscape. The rise of Vox is also difficult to explain through the lens of 'cultural threat' theories (Ignazi, 1992). Spain's gradual transformation into a multiethnic society dates back to the turn of the century, yet neither at that time nor during the subsequent economic crisis did this phenomenon appear to play a decisive role in voting behavior (Uribe-Etxebarria et al., 2012). Moreover, between 2013 and 2019, Spain did not experience major conflicts or public controversies related to immigration or multiculturalism (Cervi, 2020). As a result, it can be argued that the emergence of the party led by Santiago Abascal was not a reaction to the gradual changes associated with the increasing multiculturalism of Spanish society (Rydgren, 2007).

Nonetheless, although Vox's rise does not follow the usual pattern proposed by culturally driven explanations – mainly focused on multiethnic conflict – it can indeed be linked to issues of collective identity. In particular, the party's sudden success appears closely connected to the perceived threat to Spanish national unity triggered by the resurgence of Catalan separatism in late 2017 (Rama et al., 2021). In this sense, it is by no means coincidental that the party led by Santiago Abascal gained momentum immediately after the illegal independence referendum held in Catalonia (García Agustín & Cossarini, 2025). At that point, large segments of Spanish society began to perceive a real threat to the integrity of the state – understood as a direct challenge to national identity.

Although Vox was not founded as a nationalist party – emerging instead as a right-wing splinter from the 'Partido Popular' focused on moral conservatism, fiscal liberalism, and punitive criminal justice – its breakthrough came when it managed to position itself as the defender of national survival in the face of Spain's potential disintegration. For this reason, when analyzing the party's political discourse since 2019, what has drawn the most attention in academic research is its pronounced nationalistic component, evident both in its rhetoric and in its policy platform (Aladro & Requeijo, 2020; Barrio et al., 2021). More than populist or authoritarian, Vox presents itself primarily as a Spanish nationalist party (Ferreira, 2019). Or, as its leader Santiago Abascal once put it, not so much a conventional political party as "an instrument for the defense of Spain" (Abascal, 2015, p. 77).

In short, Vox's entry into the Spanish Parliament does not fit the explanatory frameworks of economic grievance theories, nor can it be understood as a revolt of globalization's 'losers.' While its breakthrough cannot be directly attributed to

cultural threat theories either, there is an indirect connection to that line of explanation. Vox did not emerge in response to ethnic or multicultural tensions within Spanish society, but rather as a reaction to the contested nature of Spain's plurinational statehood. Put differently, the party led by Santiago Abascal is best understood as a political product of territorial conflict and the secessionist dynamics that have shaped recent Spanish politics.

From this core ideological foundation – rooted in a deeply nationalist and centralist worldview – Vox broadens its political agenda and develops its thematic priorities. As the next section will show, the party places considerable emphasis on what it calls the 'battle of ideas,' presenting itself as something more than a conventional political organization. In the words of its leader, it conceives of itself as a "metapolitical artifact" (Sánchez-Dragó, 2019, p. 113).

3. Vox as a Vehicle of Metapolitics

Despite the emphasis that Vox's strategists and leaders place on its metapolitical dimension, academic research has so far paid little attention to this facet of the Spanish far right. Most published studies have focused on the ideological features of its program and the sociological profile of its electorate, while giving significantly less consideration to strategic issues. In particular, little has been done to explore how Vox conceives of itself in terms of its political function and its role within the broader ideological ecosystem of the far right. This gap can be explained, in part, by the opacity that characterizes this political family and the structural distrust it tends to exhibit toward journalists and academics, whom it often regards as ideological adversaries.

Vox is the Spanish political party that invests most heavily in what is often referred to as the 'culture war,' drawing on Antonio Gramsci's classic formulation (Gramsci, 2018). According to the party's official financial disclosures, the organization led by Santiago Abascal allocates €2.6 million annually to its main think tank: 'Fundación Disenso' [Disenso Foundation]. Of that amount, €1.2 million goes toward salaries, while the remaining €1.4 million covers expenses such as rent and external professional services (Ejerique, 2024). This investment is more than double what Spain's two major parties – the Partido Socialista Obrero Español and the Partido Popular – spend on their own ideological foundations, highlighting the central importance the far right in Spain places on the so-called 'battle of ideas' (Europa Press, 2024).

In a country where, following the democratic transition, political culture was deeply shaped by institutionalism – and where consensus held an almost 'sacred' status throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s – it is particularly striking that Vox has positioned itself, from the very beginning, as a party that sees democracy not

as a space for agreement, but fundamentally as a field of conflict and confrontation (Abascal, 2015, p. 38). Within this logic, Spain's far right defines its role as one of 'breaking the progressive consensus' (Sánchez Dragó, 2019, p. 173), insisting on the importance of holding firm to its principles, even when those principles are unpopular or represent a minority view. For the party's leadership, this approach serves to anchor the ideological stance of the right as a point of resistance to what they see as the pressures of a 'dominant consensus' (Abascal, 2015, p. 61). In particular, Vox presents itself as a corrective to the perceived tendency of center-right parties – such as the Partido Popular or Ciudadanos – to conform to 'political correctness.' In this context, the assessment Santiago Abascal offered in 2015 of the liberal party Ciudadanos is especially revealing:

"Ciudadanos is vagueness turned into a political party. It's a friendly, inoffensive force that drifts toward the extreme center. We've chosen a completely different path: we want to be sharp-edged, to stand for clear values, and to have leaders who take sides and make bold commitments" (Abascal, 2015, p. 33).²

To describe its political and intellectual role, Vox often turns to two vivid metaphors. The first draws from 'sogatira,' a traditional tug-of-war game popular in the Basque Country, where two teams pull on opposite ends of a rope, each trying to drag the other onto their side. It's a contest of strength and endurance – whoever manages to pull their opponents into their territory wins. Vox sees itself as that kind of force: firmly positioned on the far right, it aims to shift the entire field of politics, gradually pulling both its right-wing allies and left-wing opponents closer to its starting point (Quintana Paz, 2025, p. 92ff.).

This image is closely tied to another concept embraced by Spain's far right: the so-called 'Overton window.' As one senior member of Vox's communications team puts it, the party sees this tug-of-war as part of a broader effort to redefine what is politically acceptable in public discourse: "Our mission as a patriotic force is to move the Overton window – to make things possible today that were unthinkable ten years ago, and to push so that what now seems unthinkable starts to feel imaginable, even plausible, within the next five years" (A. Ávila, personal communication, 14. May 2024). This focus on *metapolitical* work is so central to Vox's strategy that some party members say it would be worthwhile even if another party or candidate were to ultimately capitalize on its efforts: "What truly matters – and this is something many of us in Vox, and especially at the Disenso Foundation, keep in mind – is that our ideas spread and eventually become mainstream. That matters far more than winning elections" (A. Ávila, personal communication, 14. May 2024).

2 All quotes from Spanish into English have been translated by the author.

The second image draws on an episode from Spain's colonial history in the Philippines: the last stand of a small military unit of forty soldiers in the town of Baler. This group held their position for more than six months – even after Spain had lost the war and handed control of the archipelago over to the United States of America. Spain's far right views this episode as a quintessential symbol of resistance, national pride, and unwavering loyalty. For Vox, 'the heroes of the Philippines' embody a powerful moral example and offer a lesson of deep symbolic value: in politics, the will to endure is essential (Abascal, 2015, p. 51). It is no coincidence that Vox leader Santiago Abascal often invokes this spirit of defiance, adopting as a political motto a phrase attributed to Camilo José Cela — a Spanish Nobel Prize-winning author —: "he who resists, wins" (Sánchez-Dragó, 2019, p. 100).

Vox applies this spirit of resistance and irreducibility to its everyday political strategy. "What sets us apart from the Partido Popular and the rest of the Spanish right is that we never back down – we never see a battle as lost. We always put principles and ideology first. That goes for the fight against historical memory laws, against so-called feminism, and in defense of the right to life" (Abascal, 2015, p. 43). Vox treats intransigence not only as a moral and political virtue, but also as a deliberate strategy. As one member of its communications team puts it: "Back in 2019, taking on the 2030 Agenda or the so-called NGOs that promote immigration might have seemed reckless. Now it doesn't – people reward consistency and conviction" (I. Sevilla, personal communication, 11. March 2022). That same advisor offers a broader reading of the political moment: "People want values, and they want strength. We're no longer in the era of the Transition, when compromise and consensus were prized. Today, what people respond to is confrontation and firmness" (I. Sevilla, personal communication, 11. March 2022).

Ultimately, Vox sees itself not just as a political party, but first and foremost as a metapolitical actor – that is, a political platform that places ideological struggle at the heart of its mission. This approach is not accidental; it reflects a deliberate and sustained strategic choice. For this reason, the party allocates a notably large share of its resources – far more than other political parties – to funding its main think tank, the Disenso Foundation. This substantial investment helps explain, at least in part, the party's growing international profile and, in particular, its 'Latin American venture,' which will be explored in the next section.

4. Iberosphere as a Strategic Asset

The 'Iberosphere' is a neologism coined by Vox, modeled on the term 'Anglosphere.' The party introduced the concept in late 2019 to refer to a geopolitical and cultural space where it aims to extend its strategic influence. This imagined sphere includes Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, and, to a lesser extent,

Brazil and Portugal. Notably, the discursive construction of the 'Iberosphere' omits other regions that were also part of the Spanish colonial empire, such as Equatorial Guinea, the former Spanish Sahara, and former Asian territories like the Philippines. Likewise, former Portuguese colonies in Africa or Asia do not appear to be included in this framework. (Fernández-Vázquez, 2023)

Historically, Vox associates the concept of the 'Iberosphere' with the former Spanish Empire, emphasizing its 'cultural and civilizational heritage.' In Vox's discourse, the term 'Iberosphere' is used interchangeably with 'Hispanidad' (Hispanity) and 'Hispanic Empire.' This linguistic fluidity aims to modernize imperial terminology and symbolically rehabilitate Spain's colonial history by removing negative connotations. In this context, Vox uses the term 'Iberosphere' as a 'conceptual weapon' against critics of Spain's history, particularly those who propagate the 'Leyenda Negra' (Black Legend), a critical narrative that emphasizes the violence of the Spanish conquest and colonial domination in the Americas (Ballester Rodríguez, 2021). To counter this narrative, Vox promotes cultural materials that offer a more favorable interpretation of Spain's imperial legacy and its role in the Americas (González Cuevas, 2019).

For example, Vox has publicly supported documentaries such as 'España, la primera globalización' and 'Hispanoamérica: canto de vida y esperanza,' both directed by José Luis López Linares. The party has also promoted the book 'Imperiofobia' by Elvira Roca Barea on its social media platforms and has encouraged Spanish filmmakers to create films or series about Admiral Blas de Lezo, one of the most renowned military figures of the Spanish Empire.³

Theoretically, the concept of the 'Iberosphere' draws from the writings of Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno, particularly his book "España frente a Europa" [Spain versus Europe] (Bueno, 2019). Bueno argues that the "Iberosphere" is both a geographical and symbolic space representing Spain's "greatest creation" – the "fruit of Hispanidad" (Bueno, 1999, p. 378) – and a vocational mission: a "historical duty" and the embodiment of the "Hispanic ideal" (Bueno, 2019, p. 380). Accordingly, the 'Iberosphere' also serves as a caution against two potential 'risks' for Spain: the federalist vision of the European Union and the country's possible opening to Africa and the Maghreb. In opposition to these temptations, the 'Iberosphere'-project seeks to reorient Spain's influence back toward the Atlantic, focusing either on the United States of America or Latin America.

From a strategic standpoint, Eduardo Fernández Luiña, Director of Studies at Vox's Disenso Foundation, describes the 'Iberosphere' as "an area of economic, cultural, and political influence" (E. Fernández-Luiña, personal communication, 11.

3 From this perspective, the perceived enemies of the 'Iberosphere' include both the indigenist narratives championed by political parties in countries such as Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador, as well as a significant portion of modern historiography.

March 2022), both for Spain as a nation and for Vox as a political actor. Notably, Spain is the third-largest investor in Latin America, after the United States of America and China. According to Fernández Luiña, the 'Iberosphere'-project envisions greater "economic coordination for a market of more than 800 million people," a renewed emphasis on the cultural ties that bind these countries, and stronger "political cooperation" to defend "democracy, the rule of law, and individual freedoms" throughout the region (E. Fernández-Luiña, personal communication, 11. March 2022). In this sense, the 'Iberosphere' serves as a conceptual framework designed for strategic use in political, economic, and cultural domains.

The most immediate political outcome of the 'Iberosphere'-project has been the establishment of a network of international events designed to bring together and coordinate a range of political actors who share a common vision and a conservative agenda for Latin America. These gatherings, known as 'Iberosphere Summits,' are organized in two formats. The first, broader in scope, brings together political parties, movements, and civil society organizations from across the Ibero-American space, along with European allies of Vox such as Poland's Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) and Hungary's Fidesz. To date, four general summits have taken place: the first was held virtually in 2021 due to the pandemic; the second in Madrid in 2022; the third, also in Madrid, in 2023; and the most recent one, again in Madrid, in June 2025 (Benito, 2025).

The second format follows a regional logic and involves political parties, social movements, civil society organizations, and public figures representing various strands of Latin American conservatism. Four regional summits have been held thus far: the first in Bogotá (Colombia) in February 2022; the second in Lima (Peru) in March 2023; the third in Buenos Aires (Argentina) in September 2024; and the fourth in Asunción (Paraguay) in June 2025.

From an ideological standpoint, the 'Iberosphere'-project is structured around the identification of two levels of political antagonisms. Within this framework, participants in the 'Iberosphere Summits' share a common perspective that defines two types of strategic adversaries. The first, at the regional level, comprises progressive Latin American parties and leaders associated with the São Paulo Forum and the Puebla Group. Vox frequently describes these actors as "enemies of democracy, freedom, and Western values" (Abascal, 2022). Among the political parties targeted are Brazil's Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC), Venezuela's Partido Socialista Unificado de Venezuela (PSUV) and Bolivia's Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS), as well as Argentina's Partido Justicialista (PJ), Chile's Frente Amplio (FA), Mexico's Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA), and the current ruling party in Colombia – Pacto Histórico. Likewise, discourse emerging from this space regularly criticizes former progressive leaders in the region – such as Rafael Correa (Ecuador), Evo Morales (Bolivia), Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Argentina), and Dilma Rousseff (Brazil) – portraying them

as emblematic of a political model that Vox and its allies regard as authoritarian and fundamentally at odds with democratic values (Oxford Analytica, 2022).

The 'Iberosphere'-project thus materializes as a call to "patriots and democrats on both sides of the Atlantic" (Tersch, 2022) to join forces in the fight against so characterized left-wing governments and progressive think tanks in the region. This call is subsequently operationalized through a series of alliances and a calendar of meetings aimed at energizing and expanding this strategic alliance.

The 'Iberosphere'-project serves a dual political function for Vox. On the one hand, it operates as a 'calling card' for the party within the Latin American conservative sphere (Tersch, 2022). On the other, it functions as an initiative launched from Spain to mobilize the European far right in defense of "freedoms in Ibero-America," (Tersch, 2022) by offering support and coordination to opposition groups in countries such as Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Brazil, and Venezuela. The significance of the 'Iberosphere Summits' lies not so much in the ideological homogeneity of the participating parties, movements, and organizations, but rather in the existence of a shared framework of antagonisms and a convergence around a set of strategic objectives (Fernández-Vázquez, 2024).

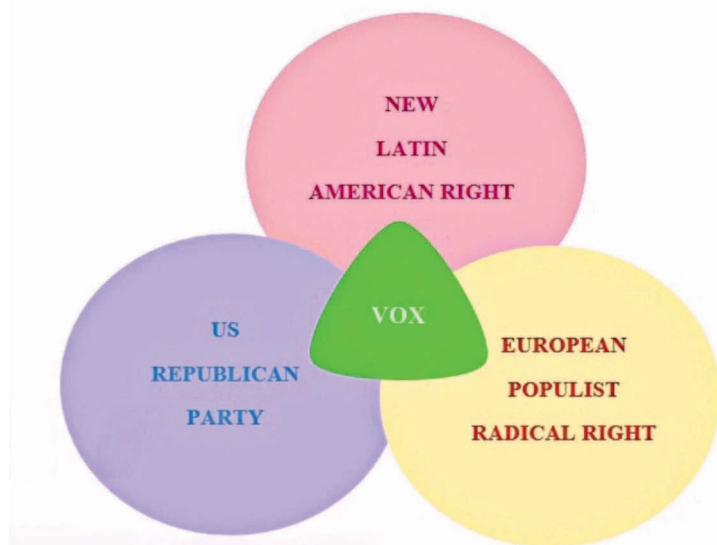
The second level of political antagonism identified in the 'Iberosphere'-project positions China as its primary geopolitical adversary. In this context, the 'Iberosphere' is framed as "the response of the Iberian heritage world to China's growing influence and assertiveness in the Latin American region" (E. Fernández-Luiña, personal communication, 11. March 2022). The project acknowledges the emergence of a multipolar world order and the intensification of the rivalry between the United States of America and China, openly aligning itself with the so-called 'Western bloc.' "In a world of blocs," Fernández-Luiña asserts, "the Iberosphere has the opportunity to play a meaningful role alongside the Anglosphere and, so to speak, the Western bloc" (E. Fernández-Luiña, personal communication, 11. March 2022). As a result, the 'Iberosphere' reflects an explicit commitment by various political, social, and economic actors to align with the Atlanticist axis in a region increasingly shaped by geopolitical competition with China.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that the 'Iberosphere'-project gained significant momentum following Vox's participation in the CPAC in February 2020. During this visit, Vox leaders had the opportunity to engage with key figures from the U.S. Republican Party, as well as with Luis Almagro, then-president of the Organization of American States. Although the term had been introduced in September 2019, its usage remained intermittent and hesitant until the CPAC event.⁴ Since that

4 Until February 2020, Vox was hesitant to adopt the term 'Iberosphere.' An illustrative example is Santiago Abascal's speech at the party's annual event, 'Vistalegre II: Plus Ultra,' held in Madrid on October 6, 2019: "We must look to our roots and historical ties (...) [.] We Spaniards are in a privileged position: we have the great sphere of Hispanidad, the Hispano-sphere,

critical juncture – and particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic – Vox has not only consistently employed the term but has also intensified efforts to consolidate and expand the project. These efforts include the establishment of the ‘Madrid Forum’ and the organization of the so-called ‘Iberosphere Summits’ (Benito, 2021). Closely linked to these initiatives is the Madrid Charter, a manifesto promoted by Vox to denounce alleged threats from leftist movements in Latin America and to build a transnational alliance of right-wing actors. Significantly, since 2020, the number of Vox-led tours in Latin America has increased, paralleling the rise in participants at the Madrid Forum and signatories of the Madrid Charter (Ruiz, 2025).

Figure 1: Vox as a Communication Hub Among Western Far-Right Blocs⁵



Through the ‘Iberosphere’-project, the Spanish far right aims to position itself as a bridge or communication hub among various organizations that share both political hostility toward the ‘global left’ and geopolitical alignment with the ‘Atlanticist

which connects us through language and culture with millions of people around the world who are our brothers. The Iberosphere, if you will, which also unites us with our Portuguese brothers. This is our strength, and they must be our allies. We must stand shoulder to shoulder with them to defend our identity, our culture, our historical legacy, and to earn respect in the world” (Europa Press, 2019).

5 Figure prepared by the article’s author, Guillermo Fernández-Vázquez.

bloc.’ This central role places Vox at the intersection of three groups of Western political actors. First, Santiago Abascal’s party functions as a key intermediary between the emerging Latin American right and the U.S.-based Make America Great Again (MAGA)-movement. Second, Vox serves as a link between the European far right and the new Latin American right.⁶ In both cases, Vox’s role is not only to connect these actors, but also to actively foster and energize relationships among different sectors of the Western far right.

Finally, the ‘Iberosphere’-project also serves a tactical purpose. As Isidoro Sevilla puts it, its goal is “to develop a network of contacts and international relations with conservative forces throughout Spanish America” (I. Sevilla, personal communication, 11, March 2022). According to this member of Vox’s communications team, its strategic value lies in the ability to “build a powerful network of contacts, even before [Vox] has become a governing force” (I. Sevilla, personal communication, 11. March 2022). In this regard, the initiative seeks to outpace the Partido Popular (PP) – the main party of Spain’s conventional right – in the field of international relations. Ultimately, the aim is to overturn PP’s traditional hegemony in this domain and ensure that “conservative parties across the two American hemispheres look to us [Vox] before they look to the PP” (J.-M. Sayago, personal communication, 7. May 2022). The immediate goal of Santiago Abascal’s party, then, is to position itself as the main interlocutor in Spain for leaders such as Javier Milei (Argentina), José Antonio Kast (Chile), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), and María Corina Machado (Venezuela). In this sense, the ‘Iberosphere’-project can also be understood as a maneuver to sideline the traditional right in the realm of international relations with the Spanish-speaking world.

5. Ethnic Hispanism as a distinctive feature

A theoretical engagement with the concept of the ‘Iberosphere’ introduces a second dimension in which Vox partially departs from the typical profile of ‘Populist Radical Right Parties’ (PRRPs) (Mudde, 2007). In particular, the ‘Iberosphere’-project creates space to soften or reconfigure Vox’s nativist stance. Cas Mudde defines nativism as “an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group – the nation – and that non-native elements – people and ideas – are

6 Vox’s involvement in this second stream of communication has been significantly facilitated by the party’s participation in the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group in European Parliament. Within this framework, Santiago Abascal’s party has taken a leading role in the “Eurolat” section, which is specifically tasked with managing and strengthening relations with Latin America (Morel, 2024).

existentially threatening to the nation-state" (Mudde, 2007, p. 22). He further notes that nativism forms the ideological backbone of PRRPs.

Vox's initial stance is rooted in a nativist worldview, according to which the Spanish nation belongs by right or 'blood' – *ius sanguinis* – to a specific group: the natives, understood as 'authentic' or 'true-born' Spaniards. This nativist outlook is evident in numerous statements across Vox's discourse, including slogans such as "In Spain, Spaniards come first" and "Spain first" (Abascal 2019), which clearly echo Donald Trump's America First-motto. The party's rhetoric and electoral programs consistently reinforce this message, frequently asserting that "Spaniards will always come first in Spain." (Abascal, 2018) These expressions of nativism are closely interwoven with a broader, explicitly anti-immigration agenda.

Despite its generally restrictive discourse on immigration, Vox introduces a notable 'exception clause' tied to its 'Iberosphere'-project. According to this clause, migrants from countries that form part of the 'Iberosphere' would receive preferential treatment, making them not only "accepted" but even "welcomed" (Tersch, 2022) in the former imperial metropole. This preferential stance rests on three main arguments. The first is pragmatic: given Spain's ongoing "severe demographic crisis," the party argues that immigration from "brother nations in Ibero-America" (Abascal, 2022, minute 5:33 to minute 6:03) – countries with which Spain shares language, values, and culture – offers a potential remedy. In this vein, the policy document '100 Medidas Para la España Viva' declares that, if Vox were to govern, it would prioritize in its immigration policy "those nationalities that share a language and cultural ties with Spain" (Vox, 2019, p. 06). The same document also outlines a plan to organize and promote migration flows from countries within the 'Iberosphere' (Vox, 2019, p. 24).

The second argument is political in nature and asserts that the inhabitants of the 'Iberosphere' are historically connected to the native group. As a result, according to Vox, the citizens of the 'Iberosphere' can be regarded as cultural "brothers." This is not merely rhetorical – it is also strategic. The leader of Vox has deliberately used the term "compatriots" (Abascal, 2020, minute 15:30 to minute 16:25) in successive rallies – emphasizing its full political significance – to refer to Mexican, Colombian, Venezuelan, or Argentine immigrants living in Spain or the United States of America. According to Santiago Abascal, the peoples of the 'Iberosphere' share a special closeness with Spain's native population. Specifically, the citizens of the 'Iberosphere' – e.g. Argentinians, Colombians, Peruvians, Cubans, Brazilians, or Mexicans, among others – form an auxiliary belt that both surrounds and complements the native core.

Figure 2: Ethnic Hispanism⁷



This logic of privileging citizens of the ‘Ibersphere’ may be termed “Ethnic Hispanism” (Fernández-Vázquez, 2024, p. 721), or ‘Hispanismo Étnico’ in the original Spanish. It can be understood as a form of ‘expanded nativism’ that, while preserving its exclusionary stance toward immigration from Africa and Asia, redefines the boundaries of the native group to include citizens from the so-called ‘Ibersphere’ (Sanahuja & López Burian, 2022). In this way, ‘Ethnic Hispanism’ extends the notion of the ethnic nation to encompass individuals from most of Spain’s former colonies, as well as Brazil. The logo of a media outlet aligned with Vox – ‘La Gaceta de la Ibersfera’ – captures this idea with striking visual clarity (Figure 3).

The third argument is tactical in nature and has so far received little attention in academic analyses. According to Spain’s far right, citizens of the ‘Ibersphere’ can play an indirect role in reinforcing national unity. More specifically, Vox claims that Spanish-speaking migrants from the ‘Ibersphere’ help promote the use of Spanish in autonomous communities where other official languages are spoken. The presence of Argentinians, Mexicans, Colombians, or Venezuelans in regions such as Catalonia or the Basque Country, the argument goes, strengthens the ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Spanish’ character of those territories, helping to reduce separatist tensions. As one member of Vox’s communications team put it bluntly: “Chilean, Brazilian, Venezuelan, or Paraguayan citizens living in Barcelona, Bilbao, or Tarragona are generally not inclined to accept being forced to learn a language other than Spanish – let alone support secessionist political projects.” (A. Ávila, personal communication, 14. May 2024) This presumed reluctance among ‘Ibersphere’ migrants to embrace Catalan, Basque, or Galician nationalism is seen by Vox as an indirect tool for fostering national cohesion. Ultimately, the party led by Santiago Abascal views the Spanish-speaking population in these regions as a potential counterbalance to the centrifugal pressures facing the Spanish state.

In comparative terms, there are no clear parallels to this form of ‘expanded nativism’ within the ideological repertoire of other parties belonging to this political

7 Figure 2 was prepared by the author himself, Guillermo Fernández-Vázquez.

family. Far-right forces in countries with significant colonial histories – such as France, the United Kingdom, or Belgium – do not articulate any ‘exception to the nativist rule’ that affords preferential treatment to citizens of their former colonies. Nor do they propose preference clauses or symbolic mechanisms of incorporation that would include these populations within the boundaries of the national group as ‘potential compatriots.’ In this sense, the ‘Ethnic Hispanism’ advanced by Vox represents a distinctive case in the European landscape: an ideologically specific development within the Spanish far right, rooted in its effort to reframe the imperial legacy in positive terms and mobilize it as a contemporary political resource (Fernández-Vázquez, 2023).

Figure 3: Branding of La Gaceta de la Iberosfera (2025)



As a point of contrast, the case of Portugal's far right, represented by Chega, is particularly telling. Although Portugal falls within both the conceptual and geographic scope of the 'Iberosphere'-project, the party led by André Ventura makes only passing reference to the term and shows little interest in leveraging it for political purposes. Its involvement in the so-called 'Iberosphere Summits' has likewise been minimal, both in the main gatherings and in their regional iterations. This detachment stands in stark contrast to the active engagement of Brazil's Partido Liberal in the 'Iberosphere' strategy and in initiatives promoted by the 'Madrid Forum' (Golstein, 2024). Especially noteworthy is the prominent role played by Eduardo Bolsonaro – son of former president Jair Bolsonaro – who has emerged as one of the key figures driving these summits and related events (Bertaccini, 2024).

Lastly, it is important to highlight that, while the ‘Iberosphere’-project has been translated into a concrete political agenda and a network of recurring events, the same is not true of ‘Ethnic Hispanism.’ This formulation of expanded nativism has yet to be reflected in any specific piece of legislation. Beyond rhetorical statements found in public speeches or electoral platforms, Vox has not proposed or supported any legal initiatives aimed at easing immigration from countries within the so-called ‘Iberosphere’. In fact, it is telling that the party has not only avoided advancing such measures, but has consistently opposed, in parliamentary debates, any attempt to regularize migrant populations – regardless of whether they come from Hispanic countries or elsewhere.

6. Conclusions

Vox offers a particularly insightful case for studying the rise of the new far right in Europe – and, more broadly, for understanding how these movements are reshaping their ideological and geopolitical strategies in the 21st century. This chapter has argued that Vox’s emergence cannot be fully accounted for by classic theories of economic grievance or cultural threat. Instead, it reflects dynamics more specifically linked to territorial conflict within the Spanish state. It has also highlighted the *metapolitical* character of Vox’s project, along with its distinctive international strategy: the ‘Iberosphere.’ Taken together, these two dimensions – ideological confrontation and transnational outreach – are the key vectors of innovation that set Santiago Abascal’s party apart within the broader family of Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs).

To begin with, it is important to highlight that Vox’s entry into the Spanish parliament in 2019 was not a direct response to the effects of the 2008 financial crisis or to the impact of globalization on the most vulnerable sectors of Spanish society. Unlike in other European countries, where far-right parties capitalized on economic discontent, Vox’s rise cannot be understood as an expression of the ‘losers of globalization.’ In fact, its initial electorate came largely from the middle and upper-middle classes, and the party’s consolidation took place in a context marked by the resurgence of territorial conflict following the illegal independence referendum in Catalonia in 2017. From this perspective, Vox emerges as a political product of the crisis of the Spanish state model and the challenge to national unity, rather than a response to economic insecurity or the multicultural transformation of society.

This interpretive framework helps explain the strong nationalist component that has defined Vox’s discourse since its rise. Rather than a populist or authoritarian party – as it is often labeled – Vox presents itself primarily as a Spanish nationalist force. Santiago Abascal himself has described the party as “an instrument for the defense of Spain” (Abascal, 2015, p. 77), rather than a conventional political formation.

This identity-based, defensive conception of politics is key to understanding both Vox's rhetorics and its programmatic priorities. In this sense, Vox's entry into parliament is not driven by a material cleavage, but by a predominantly symbolic one: the defense of the nation against a perceived existential threat.

From this ideological position, Vox has pursued a strategy that goes beyond conventional electoral logic. As this article has shown, the party sees itself as a *metapolitical* actor, committed to a long-term cultural battle. In a political system like Spain's – historically defined by institutionalism and a deep-rooted culture of consensus – it is especially striking that an emerging force openly identifies as a 'combative minority' and deliberately distances itself from the values of compromise and moderation. Rather than treating democracy as a space for negotiation, Vox frames it as an arena for ideological confrontation. This vision has led the party to devote significant financial and symbolic resources to the 'culture war,' largely through its flagship think tank, the Disenso Foundation.

Two symbolic images lie at the core of Vox's metapolitical strategy, capturing how the party sees itself: the Basque *sogatira* (tug-of-war) and the military garrison at Baler in the Philippines. The first reflects a desire to pull the ideological center of gravity – to destabilize the political mainstream by shifting the limits of acceptable discourse (the famous 'Overton window') toward more conservative or reactionary ground. The second invokes a spirit of resistance, even in the face of isolation or defeat, serving as a moral and political compass for the party's base. Together, these metaphors shape an ethos of sustained ideological struggle, where perseverance and resolve are core virtues. This orientation sheds light on why Vox prioritizes discourse production, the crafting of new political language, and cultural intervention as essential to its broader project.

The construction of the 'Iberosphere' fits squarely within Vox's *metapolitical* and identity-driven strategy – a project that weaves together geopolitical, cultural, and ideological threads. Coined by the party in 2019, the term refers to an imagined community that includes Spain, Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, and, to a lesser extent, Brazil and Portugal. With this concept, Vox aims to build a transatlantic network of conservative alliances, pursuing a dual goal: to push back against the 'left's' influence in Latin America and to counter China's expanding footprint in the region. This strategy has taken concrete form through a series of events – known as 'Iberosphere Summits' – designed not only to strengthen ties with like-minded parties and movements across Latin America, but also to link them with other far-right actors in Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe.

The 'Iberosphere'-project brings with it a partial rethinking of the concept of nativism – a defining feature of far-right parties, according to much of the academic literature. In Vox's case, this takes a distinctive form: while the party maintains a hardline, exclusionary stance toward African and Muslim migrants, it introduces an 'exception clause' for citizens of the 'Iberosphere.' This exception rests on three main

arguments. The first is demographic: the need to offset Spain's population decline with migrants considered 'culturally compatible.' The second is political: a supposed historical and civilizational affinity with Hispanic American nations. The third is tactical: the idea that Spanish-speaking migrants could help reinforce the use of Spanish and strengthen national unity in regions with strong separatist movements, such as Catalonia or the Basque Country. This form of expanded nativism can be described as 'Ethnic Hispanism,' and it has no clear counterpart among other far-right parties in Europe.

That said, it is worth noting that this idea of expanded nativism has not, at least to date, been reflected in concrete public policies or legislative efforts aimed at supporting migrants from the 'Iberosphere.' On the contrary, Vox has consistently rejected government proposals to regularize undocumented immigrants – many of whom come from Latin American countries – or to loosen the requirements for legal residency. This reveals a clear gap between the party's rhetorics and its actual behavior in parliament.

In sum, the case of Vox highlights several key elements that deserve closer attention in the study of the new far right. On the one hand, it shows that the rise of these forces cannot be explained solely by economic or cultural factors but must also be understood in relation to territorial and identity-based conflicts. On the other hand, it illustrates that these parties do not operate exclusively within the electoral arena but also pursue long-term *metapolitical* strategies. Finally, the case of Vox demonstrates that far-right movements are experimenting with new forms of international projection – blending geopolitics, history, and ideology – as seen in the ambitious, if still evolving, 'Iberosphere'-project. Taken together, these dimensions make Vox both a distinctive and revealing example of the ongoing ideological reconfiguration of the radical right in today's political landscape.

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8. Vox Interviews Conducted with Vox Members⁸

- In-depth interview with Isidoro Sevilla (Vox), FIERCE Research Project. Date: 11. March 2022.
- In-depth interview with Eduardo Fernández-Luiña (Disenso Foundation), FIERCE Research Project. Date: 11. March 2022.
- In-depth interview with José Manuel Sayago (Disenso Foundation). FIERCE Research Project. Date: 05. May 2022.
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8 These in-depth interviews are part of the fieldwork conducted within the framework of the European project FIERCE (*Feminist Movements Revitalizing Democracy in Europe*), funded by the European Commission. The project's overall aim is to analyze the antifeminist response to the rise of feminist movements in various European countries, with particular attention to its political and democratic implications.

