

GENDER AND IMMIGRATION IN VOX. THE DISCOURSE OF THE RADICAL RIGHT IN SPAIN

GÉNERO E INMIGRACIÓN EN VOX. EL DISCURSO DE LA DERECHA RADICAL EN ESPAÑA

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Abstract: *This article aims to analyse the gender equality and immigration discourse of VOX. VOX is a member of the European radical right-wing family of political parties that are characterised by the ideological principles of conservatism, nationalism, and nativism. In its analysis of the growth of such forces in Europe, this article focuses on the intersection between the fields of migration studies and gender studies. Qualitative methodology is employed to analyse the official documents and parliamentary speeches of this political party. The results of the analysis obtained show that VOX calls for greater border control and tougher penalties for irregular immigration, which they view as a crime. On gender issues they seek to preserve traditional roles and the division of labour along gender lines, attack feminism as an ideology, and finally, promote natalist policies.*

Key words: *VOX; political discourse; radical right; immigration; gender.*

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Resumen: Este artículo busca analizar el discurso del partido político VOX en materia de igualdad de género e inmigración. VOX es partido político que podemos ubicar dentro de la familia de la derecha radical europea que se caracteriza por su conservadurismo, su nacionalismo, y su nativismo como principios ideológicos. Este artículo pone en diálogo los estudios migratorios con los de género para analizar el crecimiento de estas fuerzas en Europa. La metodología es cualitativa, concretamente, se analizan los documentos oficiales de la organización y los discursos parlamentarios. Los resultados destacan que buscan un mayor control de fronteras, endurecer las penas y considerar a la inmigración irregular como un delito; y en temas de género pretenden preservar los roles tradicionales y la división sexual del trabajo, atacar al feminismo como ideología, y finalmente, fomentar una política natalista.

Palabras clave: VOX; discurso político; derecha radical; inmigración; género.

INTRODUCTION

While Europe shifted to the right with the emergence of far-right populist parties, Spain and Portugal remained the exceptions to this trend (Alonso & Rovira, 2015; Dennison & Mendes, 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Rubio-Pueyo, 2019). Since Spain's transition to democracy, populist forces have occupied a marginal position in the political system. This fact was explained by a series of reasons: a) the *Partido Popular* (The People's Party) attracted a broad spectrum of both conservative and liberal politicians and voters; the great social and political dissatisfaction caused by the 2008 recession is behind the emergence of political forces such as Podemos, in the first place, and, later, Ciudadanos (Ferreira, 2019), and, c) Nationalism, as an ideological force promoting the rise of far-right parties in Europe, is in its lowest level in Spain (with the lowest ascription of citizens to the Spanish national identity, due to the association of the Spanish identity to Franco dictatorship —Gil Flores, 2019—, and to an identification with other identities, European, subnational or local —González Enríquez, 2017—).

The local elections in Andalusia in December 2018 and the general elections of April and November 2019, put an end to this exception,

confirming the emergence of a new political force: VOX. This organization stems from the most conservative wing of The People's Party (Gil Flores, 2019). Although prior to VOX there were far-right forces, such as *España 2000* (*Spain 2000*) or *Plataforma per Catalunya* (Platform for Catalonia), they did not achieve an electoral success similar to that obtained by VOX in the last three years (Hernández-Carr, 2016; Gil Flores, 2019). The electoral emergence of VOX in the Andalusian elections occurs in a context of favorable opportunities, dominated by the relevance of the Catalan conflict in the political debate, thus propelling a support for the recentralization of the state (Ferreira, 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Aladro & Requeijo, 2020; Arroyo Méndez, 2020), as well as by factors of cultural change derived from post-materialist values (rise of feminism, greater social and sexual diversity, etc.).

The social construction of immigration as a problem precedes the appearance of VOX, and it can be related to the entry of Spain into the European Union, which gives us the role of southern border in 'fortress Europe' (Agrela & Dietz, 2005, pp. 24-26). Immigrants are perceived as others possessing a cultural difference that prevents them from integrating into the destination society (Agrela & Gil Araújo, 2005). When the phenomenon of immigration is associated to the emergence of racism in Spain, this somehow omits other racialized communities, such as the gypsy population, underestimating the pre-existence or racism in Spain derived from its own past and recent colonial history (Grosfoguel, 2009; Gil Flores, 2019).

The results achieved by VOX in the 2019 general elections are explained by electoral support for their proposals in favour of recentralisation and anti-regional autonomy and by the rise in the Spanish nationalist identification. Additionally, VOX's anti-immigration stance gained electoral support in regions that received a large number of immigrants (Arango et al., 2019; Rinken, 2019; Vampa, 2020; Climent & Montaner, 2020; Turnbull-Duarte et al., 2020); regions that also largely support a more centralized and homogeneous state (Arroyo Menéndez, 2020).

The electoral and social emergence of VOX is related to colonial and patriarchal positions present in the Spanish society. Spanish colonialism is a position of racial superiority over other people reproduced by conservative elites. Although there was no party openly contrary to immigration, these positions had political support at certain moments and from certain leaders of The People's

Party (Van Dijk, 2003; Moreras, 2005), particularly reinforcing a vision of Islam as contrary to Western values and as impossible to integrate in the Spanish society (Moreras, 2005). In the social realm, the attitudes of Spaniards about immigration showed that most of them were of the opinion that immigration did not constitute a significant social problem, although it scored above gender violence, insecurity, pensions, education, housing, or other social problems (Arango, Mahía, Moya & Sánchez-Montijano, 2019). Although negative attitudes were not dominant, nativist positions were rooted in a significant social minority (Arroyo Menéndez, 2020).

VOX is a radical right-wing party with the following ideologic characteristics: authoritarian conservatism, a strong Spanish nationalist ideology, opposition to what they call *gender ideology* and the rights of LGBT+ communities, and finally, a political policy of nativism that places them in direct opposition to immigration (Ferreira, 2019; Turnbull-Duagte, 2019; Franquesa, 2019; Aladro & Requeijo, 2020; Arroyo Menéndez, 2020; Turnbull-Duarte, Rama & Santana, 2020).

The common denominator of these radical right-wing populist forces is their defence of national identity and popular sovereignty as a source of political legitimacy, the opposition between the people and a corrupt elite, and finally, the defence of a central axis of conservative values such as religion, traditional gender roles, and the family (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2019). Radical right-wing parties maintain anti-immigration postures, defend assimilation and the renunciation of the culture of foreign residents (Antón-Mellón & Hernández-Carr, 2016). In relation to gender equality, they are antagonistic to feminist ideology. Radical right-wing parties support traditional gender roles, the biological dichotomy between male and female, and are opposed to sexual and reproductive rights for women, as well as opposing LGBT+ rights (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019).

This article aims to conduct a content analysis of political discourses of VOX in relation to gender equality and immigration and to examine whether a connection exists between these two issues. The research questions addressed by the present article are as follows: What are VOX's main arguments and proposals in relation to immigration and to gender equality and the role of women in society? Does a link exist between their defence of traditional gender roles and their opposition to immigration? Does VOX express its opposition to a certain type of immigration in terms of gender?

Despite the growing academic interest generated by populism, research into VOX's ideology remains scarce due to its recent emergence in the Spanish political landscape. (Ferreira, 2019; Ramos & Büttner, 2017; Rubio-Pueyo, 2019; Aladro & Requeijo, 2020; Arroyo Menéndez, 2020; Climent & Montaner, 2020; VanderWilden, 2020). Gender based and/or feminist academic approaches to the radical right's opposition to equality is also a recent development that has not yet generated much research, although further development has occurred in northern and central European countries where radical right-wing forces have a longer political trajectory (Spierings, Zaslove, Mügge & De Lange, 2015; Spierings & Zaslove, 2015; Kantola & Lombardo, 2019). Studies that explore the relationship between the extreme right and its rejection of immigration are relevant to research carried out into theoretical paradigms of racism and xenophobia (Wodak, 2020). In summary, research into the stance taken by this group of political parties in Europe with regard to gender and immigration issues is scarce, and in most cases focuses on their nativist ideology, defence of traditional gender roles, and the impact of their discourse against gender equality. The research that does exist highlights the defence by the radical right of gender and LGBT+ equality; conceived of as an achievement of the west and in contrast to the values associated with the growth of Islam in Europe, which in turn is characterized by a denial of such rights (Fekete, 2006; Roggeband & Verllo, 2007). It is to this line of research that the present article will attempt to contribute by connecting both themes; gender and immigration, by means of a case study into the political rhetoric of VOX, for which there remains a scarcity of literature. The goal of the article is to investigate VOX's arguments and proposals relating to gender and immigration, and then to analyse to what extent their opposition to immigration is associated with gender equality issues (Akkerman, 2007 and 2015; Morgan, 2017).

This article is set out in the following four sections. The first is the theoretical framework used to address the characteristics of radical right-wing forces in Europe, specifically VOX and how it fits within this political current. The central discourse of radical right-wing parties will be explained, focusing on the link between VOX's defence of traditional gender roles, approach to gender equality, and its stance on immigration. Finally, the relationship between VOX's anti-gender equality and anti-immigration stances are

explored. Methodology is covered in the second section, presenting the research methods employed in the content and documentary analysis. The principal results of the content analysis obtained in the case study are presented in the third section, outlining VOX's conception of immigration as a threat to the nation, in the same ways as their rejection of what they call "gender ideology" and gender equality is based on its capacity to destroy the family as a basic institution for the reproduction of the nation. Finally, brief conclusions including reflections on future developments in this line of research are presented.

1. VOX: A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY OF RADICAL RIGHT-WING PARTIES?

The parties that make up the European radical right are characterized by their formal defence of the democratic regime in opposition to extremist and anti-system parties. These organizations defend the following positions: a) a mononational and monocultural vision of nation, rooted in a definition of the people as culturally homogenous; b) nativism as an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited by members of the native group, therefore, foreigners (including regional nationalistic movements and immigrants) are considered enemies of the homogeneous nation; and c) authoritarianism and the imposition of the rule of law and order, accompanied by security as an essential element of the state. Conservative ideology and the maintenance of the current social structure, and a strong attachment to tradition and authority (Mudde, 2007; Ferreira, 2019; Climent & Montaner, 2020; Wodak, 2020).

The emergence of the radical right in Europe varies across individual states. In Southern Europe (France, Greece, and Italy) its rise was related to the economic crisis of 2008. The institutionalization of radical right-wing parties is usually preceded by the appearance of powerful social movements that are predominantly anti-gender equality, constructed, as in the case of *Hazte Oír* (Make yourself heard), VOX's community participation organisation, to a great extent in opposition to what they call *gender ideology* (Kováts, 2017; Patternote & Kuhar, 2018).

One of the recurrent themes of the populist extreme right is its anti-immigration discourse, which is explicitly anti-Muslim. The social construction of Muslims as a threat in Europe is historically rooted in the rivalry between Christianity and Islam (Martín Muñoz, 2012). The representation of Muslim women is full of 'gendered Islamophobia' presenting them as oppressed in the face of patriarchy and as eager to be liberated by Western civilization (Mijares & Ramírez, 2008, pp. 127). Attitudes held by Europeans towards Muslim immigrants are considered most hostile in countries where political elites are more exclusive, and more tolerant where such elites are more inclusive (Czymara, 2020). Additionally, electoral support for radical right-wing parties with a strong nativist discourse, ergo anti-immigration, is related to pre-existing positions rooted in conservative values that activate an anti-immigration sentiment, such as law and order and traditional values (Dennison & Geddes, 2019).

The anti-immigration arguments put forward by the forces of the European radical right are distinguished by the following three characteristics: a) they are directed at an electorate that is easily identifiable based on aspects of their identity, b) they stigmatize the target group by explicitly or implicitly attributing to them qualities considered to be undesirable; and c) as a result of these perceived negative traits, immigrants are viewed as an unwelcome and hostile presence (Parekh, 2012; Akkerman, 2018). This political family of parties also feeds the concept of welfare chauvinism, by which is meant the fear that some less privileged social groups harbour towards the immigrant population, whom they perceive as their competitors for limited social welfare resources (Kymlicka, 2015). Moreover, many such parties support the concept of a less interventionist state. For example, VOX is in favour of imposing greater restrictions on access to residence permits for immigrants in an irregular situation, as well as stressing the requirement for foreign residents to make an effort to integrate into Spanish society. They also propose to match the entry of immigrant flows to the requirements of the Spanish economy. Finally, they are staunch defenders of greater border control, just as they are committed to increasing security measures, expelling, and implementing tougher penalties for immigrants in an irregular situation. In line with Trump's programme to erect a wall at the US border with Mexico, they support the building of a wall in Ceuta and Melilla to guarantee

national sovereignty. Such political parties consider Muslim foreign residents to be a threat to security, leading to a call for the closure of “fundamentalist mosques”, and the exclusion of Islam from public education (Ferreira, 2019; Rubio-Pueyo, 2019, pp.11).

Extreme right-wing forces are opposed to gender equality in Europe, they are characterized by their defence of a biological construction of sexual difference, and therefore are committed to traditional gender roles. This support for the traditional family results in opposition to women’s sexual and reproductive rights (Spierings & Zaslove, 2015; Alabao, 2019; Kantola & Lombardo, 2019). In her classic work *Gender and Nation*, Yuval-Davis (2004) points out that nationalist projects begin from the assumption that women are the nation’s biological reproducers and its repositories of culture and national identity. In this construction of the nation, minorization and racification processes are produced that include “immigrants”, “women” and “deviants” who suffer a “historical system of exclusions and complementary dominations, linked to each other” (Balibar, 1991, pp. 80-81). Therefore, it is not surprising that far-right parties are opposed to “gender ideology”, a term that stems from attempts made by religious sectors to defend their vision of the ontological difference between and the complementarity of the sexes. (Kováts, 2017, pp. 175-176; Dancygier, 2020). In its treatment of gender issues VOX is closer to the stance of Eastern European parties, than to that of France or Sweden’s neo right-wing. VOX defends the relevance of the traditional family, denies the discrimination faced by women, and opposes gender ideology, a fight personalised in their opposition to the feminist movement, for which they demand the ending of state financing of feminist organisations (Alabao, 2019; Rubio-Pueyo, 2019). A similar radical right-wing voter gender gap exists in Spain as in other European countries, with VOX attracting a mainly male electorate¹ (CIS Public Opinion Barometer, January 2021).

The link between the anti-gender equality and anti-immigration discourse of the European radical right is made by means of the instrumentalization of foreigners, who are perceived as enemies

¹ According to data from the CIS Public Opinion Barometer of January 2021, when asked ‘Which party of coalition did you vote for in the general elections of November 2019?’, 8% declares having voted VOX, but the share for men (8.7%) and women (5.3%) differ.

of the gender equality achieved by Western civilization (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019). Anti-immigration parties emphasize the cultural dimension of globalization to highlight the danger posed by immigrants, specifically, how they threaten the freedoms acquired in the West, mainly those rights won by women. This relationship between gender and immigration appears to be conditioned by the different cultures of gender equality in Europe, with it being much more rooted in the Nordic countries than in Southern Europe. An example of this relationship between gender and immigration can be seen in the application of what have been called “new assimilation policies”. Immigrant integration contracts place an emphasis on gender equality as a national cultural symbol and as a core Western value, in comparison to the patriarchal cultures of migrant communities (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017, pp. 15; Scrinzi, 2017). This connection is evident in the case of France, through the application of the republican model of immigrant integration based on individualism, universality, and secularism. State feminism in France tends to racialize sexism, presenting migrants as a threat to sexual democracy, thus making the sexism present in wider French society invisible. (Fassin, 2006; Scrinzi, 2017). This debate played out in the prohibition of wearing a veil in public, with the resulting controversy dividing French feminist activists into two dichotomous positions. Pro-equality stances are exploited by radical right-wing parties in some European countries (France, the Netherlands, and Sweden) to frame anti-immigration strategy in the political arena. The racialization of sexism consists of instrumentally mobilizing pseudo-feminist discourse to gain electoral support and legitimize opposition to immigration (Scrinzi, 2014). How VOX makes this association between immigration and the position of women in Spain in its parliamentary speeches is outlined below.

2. DOCUMENTARY AND CONTENT ANALYSIS OF VOX'S POLITICAL DISCOURSES

Qualitative research methodology is employed to systematically analyse official VOX documents (statutes, founding and electoral manifestos), and parliamentary speeches taken from the Parliamentary Record of the Congress of Deputies during the XIII

legislature, from May 21st, 2019 to September 24th, 2019, and the XIV legislature, beginning on December 3rd, 2019, with the analysis being carried out until April 30th, 2020. Thus, the research timeframe runs from May 2019 to the end of April 2020.

The aim of the present article is to analyse VOX's main arguments related to immigration and the role of women in Spanish society using both documentary and content analysis of political discourses. Content analysis is an analysis technique widely used to study the positions of parties in the political space (Alonso, Volkers & Gómez, 2012). It follows systematic and objective mechanisms of description of the discourses' content that allow for inference-making (Bardin, 1986). These inferences are reproducible and valid (Krippendorff, 1990).

Political discourse is a structured, ordered, and hierarchical system that reproduces an unequal social and symbolic structure in terms of power (Conde, 2009). According to Wodak (2003) the concepts of power, history and ideology are always implicit in discourse. Por este motivo, es relevante el estudio de los discursos políticos, en parte por su capacidad de difusión e influencia en la sociedad. Thus, political statements are located between illocutionary speech acts, that is, those that produce effects in society, and perlocutionary acts, which are those that give rise to a series of consequences (Butler, 2009). Political speeches have the power to announce actions and their verbalization can have symbolic consequences without the need for these words to lead to an action. They are therefore discourses of power. The relevance of the study of parliamentary discourses derives from the fact that they have the power to reproduce the conditions of inequality existing between different social groups, while, at the same time, turning these groups into subjects of intervention for the creation of public policies (Olmos Alcaraz, 2007).

Official documents and speeches made by representatives of VOX taken from the Parliamentary Record of the Congress of Deputies were selected and classified using the ATLAS.ti computer programme. Themes were identified, in the main related to speeches about immigration and women/gender equality, and from these broad categories subcategories were created to facilitate the subsequent analysis of the research results. Codes associated with gender equality issues are the following: women, feminism, gender violence, gender ideology, discrimination against men, and

punitive populism. The codes used to categorize the content related to immigrant are: racism, irregular migration, border control, unaccompanied minors, welfare chauvinism, public support for migrants, Islam, and foreign women². Text extracts from documents and speeches were classified according to this system.

3. VOX: NATALISM AND THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY AS ANTI-IMMIGRATION AND ANTI-GENDER EQUALITY IDEOLOGICAL STANCES

VOX is a political organization that, according to its statutes, includes among its goals the protection of the indissoluble union of the Spanish nation, the sovereignty of which resides in the whole of the Spanish people, the defence of individual freedoms and the democratic system, the defence of the equality of all Spaniards before the law, the protection of private property and the free market economy, the protection of the right to life and traditional family values. The data from the public opinion barometer of the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (Centre for Sociological Research) for January 2020 place VOX on a 9.42 score on a scale that goes from 1 (left) to 10 (right), that is, on the extreme right. The same data source highlights that, according to the opinion of Spaniards, the parties that were doing the most to support equal rights and opportunities for women were *Unidas Podemos* (23,6%) and the Socialist Party (22,4%), and the party that was doing the least for this goal was VOX (49,5%). The report from the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) entitled “*Actitudes hacia la inmigración*” (‘Attitudes towards immigration’), published in 2017, show how the voters of *Unidas Podemos* are the most likely to extend rights to the migrant population (for example, they support regularization programs), followed at a distance by the Socialist Party. While the voters of *Ciudadanos* and The People’s Party are the most reluctant

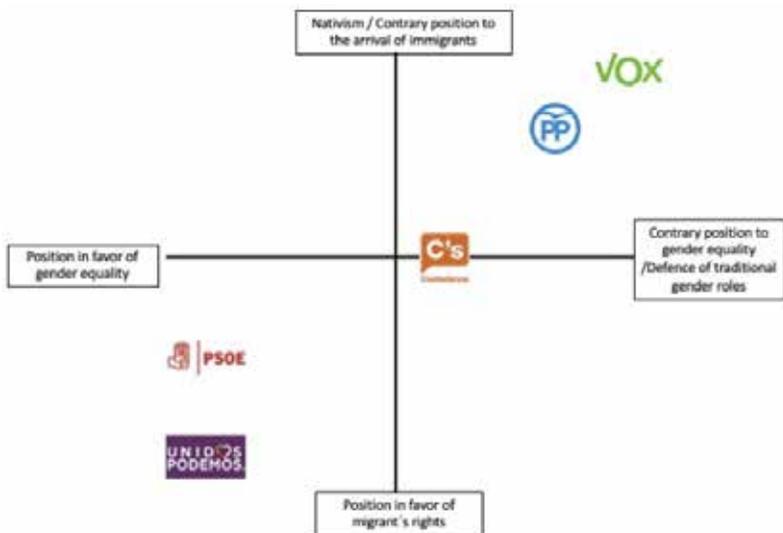
² A series of subcategories emerged during the research process, such as the following: ‘sexual violence’ repeatedly associated with immigration; ‘terrorism/terrorist threat’ linked to Muslim migration; ‘crime’, associated with immigration and connected with security-concerned positions; ‘destruction of the family’, linked to feminist stances, and, finally, ‘state feminism’, associated with the feminist movement and its dependence on public funding.

to accept an extension of the rights of the foreign population.

These data, together with the documents of the political parties around issues of gender and migration, make us see how *Unidas Podemos* and the Socialist Party are the most likely to raise demands for gender equality, as they are as well more prone to expand the rights of the migrant population. *Ciudadanos* occupies a central position on these issues, sometimes with restrictive positions towards the expansion of rights. And, finally, the most conservative forces are the least favourable to recognize new pro-gender equality rights, VOX and The People's Party (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

POSITION OF THE MAIN PARLIAMENTARY POLITICAL FORCES ON GENDER EQUALITY AND IMMIGRATION (2020)

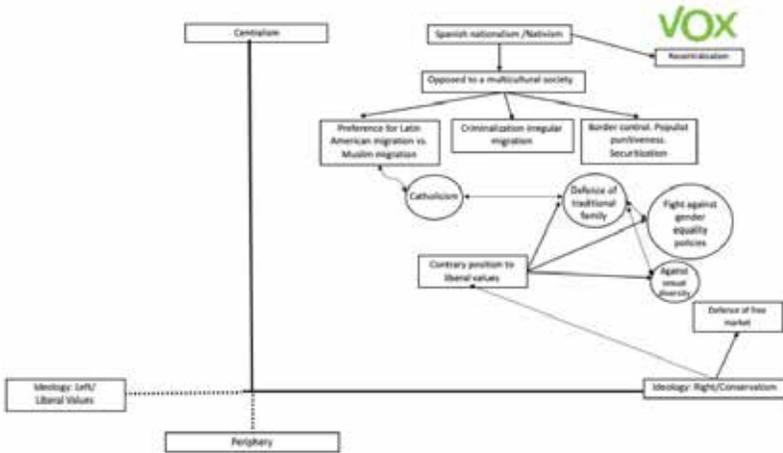


Source: author's own.

In its 2019 manifesto, for both general elections held that year, VOX called for “100 measures for *España Viva*” (Living Spain), including two sections outlining measures for immigration and for border security and control. 15 measures out of a total of 100 proposals on these topics are developed for both sections, indicating

the relevance afforded them. In general terms, the proposals relate to the criminalization of irregular immigration, support for greater immigration control measures, increased penalties to combat irregular immigration, the refusal to regularize immigrants in irregular administrative situations, the criminalization and punishment of street vending, greater integration effort required to gain access to Spanish nationality, a preference for Ibero-American immigration, a reduction in social welfare rights such as free health care for immigrants in an irregular administrative situation, anti-Islam measures (such as, for example, the exclusion of Islam from the educational system, and the prohibition and closure of mosques), the demand for data on nationality and origin in crime statistics to be published, and finally, the proposal to build a wall to protect Ceuta and Melilla.

FIGURE 2
VOX'S SYSTEM OF DISCOURSES ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND GENDER EQUALITY



Source: author's own based on documental and content analysis.

VOX's central anti-immigration arguments, that can be seen by analysing the speeches they give in the Congress of Deputies, are related to their ideas regarding loss of cultural identity, and

demonstrate that they are, in short, opposed to a multicultural society. VOX consider the entry and residence of immigrants in an irregular administrative situation in Spain to be a crime. They are staunch defenders of the tightening of policies to control immigration, and of only allowing entry to Spain of people with a regular migration status who meet the demands of the labour market. This political force asks for the elimination of all regularization measures targeting those irregular migrants living and rooted in the Spanish society. They also prefer the cultural and linguistic similarity of Ibero-American migrants above those from the Maghreb. Finally, they associate irregular immigration with greater crime and insecurity in Spain, even associating this immigration with an increase in sexual crimes against women.

The association between foreigners and crime has strong connections to VOX's ideology of reinforcing internal and external security, and of the defence of law and order as pillars of society. The criminalization of irregular immigration is a constant in VOX speeches, taking the position that orderly immigration is the only entry option, while additionally supporting an increase in punitive penalties for immigrants in an irregular situation. It is especially here where women are used to foment opposition to immigration (as it has also been shown for the Spanish case by Kantola & Lombardo, 2019, and for the rest of populist radical parties by Spierings & Zaslove, 2015), particularly associated with accusations of sexual crimes against foreigners. The women who suffer these sexual assaults are presented as being ignored by proponents of "gender ideology" and "feminism", who would conceal reports of such crimes to avoid growing xenophobia, while publicly denouncing sexual assaults committed by male nationals, thus belying the assumption of equal treatment. Associations between increased sexual violence and immigration in working-class suburbs were common in the media during the conservative government of Nicolas Sarkozy in France, resulting in a racialization of sexism by attributing it to immigrants, thus making the sexism present in wider French society invisible (Fassin, 2006; Scrinzi, 2017). This strategy, present in France at the time of Sarkozy, is also used by VOX in their parliamentary discourses. These statements are contextualised in the following declarations made by representatives of VOX in the Congress of Deputies.

When a repugnant gang rape is committed by Spaniards, we are told everything, down to the most trivial and personal details of the perpetrators, large demonstrations are called and headlines multiply. But in the dozens of similar crimes perpetrated by foreigners, everything changes. In the past week three gang rapes have been reported, but in these cases the national origin of the criminals has been blatantly concealed, and it is said this has been done so as not to provoke xenophobia. Do you understand what this means? Do you think that Spaniards should not know the truth, the real crime figures, because you take them for idiots? Do you think they need to be babied? Unfortunately, this is nothing new, it has been happening for too long and not only regarding this issue, ordinary Spaniards have been told that they are stupid for decades, that they are xenophobic, that they are homophobic, that they are sexist, that they need to be controlled and re-educated by their betters, that is, by you and by your media spokespeople.”

[Parliamentary Record of the Congress of Deputies, July 22nd, 2019]

This very week we have learned of new packs of savages attempting to rape women, but, as the perpetrators are foreigners, their crimes are conveniently silenced by feminism (...). Do you really think you are capable of convincing Spaniards that the dozens of illegal immigrants, mostly Muslims, have nothing to do with this new type of aggression, with the increase in assaults against women, against homosexuals? That they have nothing to do with the illegal trade mafias that bankrupt our small traders? Do you really think you are capable of convincing Spaniards of these lies?

[Parliamentary Record of the Congress of Deputies, 29th August 2019]

With regard to immigration, VOX has a vision of religious diversity that aligns them closer to the parties of the radical right in Eastern Europe than to similar forces present in France or in the Nordic countries. Specifically, VOX's conservative ideology considers Catholicism to be national cultural heritage worthy of preservation. Faced with the threat of Islam, they uphold Christian civilization as the foundation of Europe. Their hobbyhorse centres around the demonization of Islam as a belief that is harmful to Western society. As previously mentioned VOX's general election manifesto contained several proposals to expel imams who “spread jihad, fundamentalism, and contempt for women”, eliminate the teaching

of Islam from the public education system, and ban mosques that promote fundamentalist interpretations of Islam. An association is made in VOX's discourse about immigration, radical Islamic beliefs, and terrorism. The “cowardly little right wing” and the “progressive dictatorship”, common terms used by the leaders of VOX to refer to their political adversaries on the right and the left, are, they claim, incapable of halting the onslaught of the Islamization of Europe due to their deep-rooted multicultural and liberal creed. In this extract from a speech by Abascal, the leader of VOX in the Congress of Deputies, it can be seen how the arrival of refugees in Europe is associated with terrorist attacks, problems of coexistence, security, and the economy. The connection felt by Abascal and his admiration for the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of the Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Union party is also evident.

When he defended the will of the Hungarian people and warned that these avalanches pose a real danger, VOX alone supported Mr. Orbán, whose diagnosis we share, including the diagnosis of terrorist infiltration that you systematically conceal. (...) Mr. Orbán, who, of course, was accused of the same thing that I am going to be accused of today —how original, before I even start, I already have been!—: of racism, of xenophobia, of a lack of solidarity, and so on. (...). You know, although you keep quiet about it, that in many European cities there are neighbourhoods where Islamic law, and not civil law, prevails

[Parliamentary Record of the Congress of Deputies, 29th de August 2019]

The third anti-immigration argument is aimed at combating liberal stances taken by political forces favourable to immigration, such as: in addition to meeting the needs of the Spanish labour market for foreign labour, immigrants contribute to a slowing down of the aging of the population. VOX's nativist foundations, and the European extreme right's concern that an ethnic substitution of nationals by foreigners not take place, is founded in conservative positions at the core of the demographic. Recurrent calls are made to reverse the pressing European population problem, the “demographic winter” caused by a fall in the birth rate and an increasingly aging population, with proposals supporting traditional families with dependent children. The nativist agenda is at the centre of the identity of European radical right parties (Spierings & Zaslove, 2015), with VOX also fully assuming this political trait.

The preference for Spanish nationals would serve to preserve the integrity of the traditional family, as this forms the fundamental basis of the social order of the nation.

You are obsessed with the imposition of a new society. The policies of the current Government promote mass immigration as a way of staving off the demographic winter and as a solution to our country's economic problems. It should be remembered that, while the establishment offers this measure, more than three million Spaniards do not have a job. All parties on the parliamentary spectrum, except VOX, have created a myth: that immigrants who arrive in Spain, legally or illegally, come to save our pensions. This is another false argument that does not hold up when the numbers are checked. Despite this truth, Minister Escrivá is a firm defender of mass immigration, the objective of which is to alleviate —according to his thesis— the labour shortage, using foreign workers (...). In this context, attributing immigration with the role of saving the pension system is enormously frivolous. This supposes a supine ignorance of the problems of integration and the economy, problems that already exist in many parts of Spain and Europe, that massive immigration would cause. To this end, we will present initiatives in the legislature to control immigration based on the real needs of our economy and prioritizing those who share our roots, our customs, and our values, mainly Latin Americans”.

[Parliamentary Record of the Congress of Deputies, 4th January 2020]

Finally, a recurring anti-immigration (especially immigrants in an irregular administrative situation) argument that VOX makes links them to welfare state abuse. Once again, VOX would apply a principle of nationals first in accessing welfare state benefits, which in turn would be depleted by their defence of the free market. VOX speeches constantly affirm that Spanish nationals are deprived of social assistance in favour of foreigners, in short, activating the arguments of “welfare chauvinism”. An example of this type of statement can be seen below, in a VOX speech given in the Congress of Deputies.

This bill is once again paid for, of course, by ordinary Spaniards. While you, from your podiums, from your walled mansions, tell them that it is not enough to work and support their families and pay their taxes. No. You force them to work twice as hard, earning the same amount so that all those illegals —victims or clients of the mafias and NGOs (that turn out to be

governmental after all)— can receive free health care and enjoy the social benefits that many Spaniards have so much difficulty accessing. Do you know that the unemployment benefit that many immigrants receive is more than the average pension for the self-employed? Do you know how much it costs us to maintain an unaccompanied minor and how much widows receive in Spain? How much the Spanish lady who has made maximum contributions her entire life receives? You probably know and don't care, so, Madam Vice President, answer me if you can: how much does illegal immigration cost Spaniards, how much does it cost to maintain the centres for unaccompanied minors —you said 14,000€— how much money, how much crime, how many problems of coexistence, so that you can continue to comply with orders from Brussels?

[Parliamentary Record of the Congress of Deputies, 29th August 2019]

VOX's general election manifestos contain a series of proposals related directly or indirectly to gender equality policies. In the section on health, promises are made to abolish public funding for abortions and gender affirmation surgery. The section on education contains promises to establish a requirement to seek parental consent for school activities with ethical, social, moral, or sexual content. In the section on "Life and Family", a call to repeal the law on gender violence, and any regulations that discriminate between the sexes is made, support for opposition to enacting a domestic violence law, and the "abolition of subsidies for radical feminist organizations" is voiced, the prosecution of false reporting of gender violence, and the protection of the minor in divorce proceedings through joint custody, greater family work life balance achieved by means of the promotion of teleworking and part-time jobs, and finally, an increase in maternity leave to 180 days.

VOX's central arguments opposing what they consider "gender ideology" and the feminist movement, put forward in their appearances in the Congress of Deputies centre on the defence of the "natural family" as the basis for the reproduction of society, the division of gender roles, and the staunch defence of nativism that situate them in opposition to reproductive rights (for example, abortion) that deprive the nation of new members. In addition, they claim that so-called "gender ideology" would seek to impose its principles on the educational system, demonize men, for simply being one, and by not granting them the same right to report violent

situations in family settings. They are also opposed to the public aid system that grants resources to third-sector entities espousing feminist ideology and specialising in gender equality issues. These arguments are accompanied by an uncompromising defence of the institution of the family, supported by family friendly policies which lead to the reconstruction of the figure of the mother as the main caregiver, such as an increase in maternity leave, economic support for families with dependent children, and benefits for large families.

For VOX, feminism is an ideology that stands in opposition to the family, the cornerstone of society and part of the natural and biological order of things. The defence of the traditional family implies the assumption of gender roles and the sexual division of labour (Spierings & Zaslove, 2015; Alabao, 2019; Kantola & Lombardo, 2019). In VOX's discourses, we can see how women are considered to be the biological and social reproducers of the nation, that is, they are potential mothers within its nationalist vision. VOX's conservatism leads them to affirm that left-wing parties are in favour of the destruction of the traditional family, that by facilitating the right to abortion they fail to advocate the protection of life. Additionally, going so far as to question the very concept of gender, arguing that it is a cultural and not a biological construct. Below is an excerpt from a speech made by a representative of VOX making a case for the traditional gender roles associated with women and defending the institution of the traditional family.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are always—and at this moment more than ever— those who want to destroy the family, and those who want to destroy the family have maestros, and these maestros are the forefathers of communism themselves; Marx and Engels. The abolition of the family is not a new issue, ladies and gentlemen; it is an old issue, an issue as old as communism, which has itself proven that it does not work. As Chesterton said: “Those who speak out against the family do not know what they are doing, because they do not know what they are undoing”. And neither do you know what you are undoing, but in your status as high priests you want to impose your doctrine on a society that spends 34 million on abortions, while spending on pregnant women is 3.6 million. (Applause). We have a State that invests more in death than in life and thus, of course, with a birth rate that is lower than replacement-level, along with the 2.5 million unborn children since 1985, which would have greatly alleviated this lack of generational replacement. (...) But you don't just want to abolish the family,

ladies and gentlemen, you clearly want to abolish the family: by abolishing women. For this reason, we at VOX, want to denounce this monopoly of the left, the left that tells us what a woman should think and be in order to be a woman. Because the mothers of VOX, the militants of VOX, the professionals of VOX, the voters of VOX are neither sexists nor feminists, we are women. [Parliamentary Record of the Congress of Deputies, 18th February 2020]

VOX accuses organizations that promote the implementation of “state feminism policies” of being part of a privileged elite that stand to obtain substantial resources from the Welfare State. This is one of the standard arguments of the radical right, the plundering of the people’s resources by the liberal elite. This formulation perceives both third sector organisations that work towards gender equality, and NGOs that serve the foreign resident population, as ideological entities that therefore should not be subsidized by the public treasury. In addition to the premise that such pro-equality organizations are ideologically driven, it is also argued that gender violence policies discriminate against men by not granting them the same rights in the event of a report of domestic violence; once again questioning the structural disadvantage of women compared to men. Finally, VOX defends an increase in prison sentences for sexual offenders and for those convicted of gender violence. This punitive populism serves to proclaim themselves defenders of women, in the face of liberal forces that would reduce prison sentences for these crimes. In the extract below, reference is made to these arguments.

With this Royal Decree-Law implementing urgent measures for the protection of victims of gender violence, this Government of lies, in addition to violating the law, is once again lying to us. These measures neither require urgency, nor will they provide real protection to victims, nor does violence have a gender. The only urgency that exists here is to keep your gravy train going, publicly funded bodies that profit from the tragedy of mistreatment, living off public money and unwilling to lose privileges while Spaniards face a crisis that will haunt us for decades. How can you talk about money to fund this cross-party agreement when there are not enough tests or respirators for everyone? How can you consider spending money on institutional campaigns to spread your ideology when Spanish health workers are making protective gowns out of rubbish bags? How can you blithely tell the regional autonomous communities to spend their money on feminist propaganda while millions of Spaniards have been left

without work? I hope you are ashamed to repeat the feminist slogan that sexism kills more than coronavirus; I offer you these numbers, 1,051 women tragically murdered in seventeen years versus 24,000 killed in two months. (...) In summary, this cross-party agreement against Gender Violence, approved by all parties except VOX, liquidates constitutional guarantees and removes basic civil rights for half of the population. [Parliamentary Record of the Congress of Deputies, 22nd July 2019]

As mentioned at the start of this section, in their parliamentary speeches, VOX makes an association between irregular immigration, mainly that of Muslims and (sexual) violence against native Spanish women. In its defence of Christianity as the essence of European civilization and its opposition to immigration from Muslim countries, due to such immigrants not holding liberal values, VOX is in line with European radical right-wing parties. But far from performing the “rhetorical U-turn” made by Marine Le Pen, leader of the *Rassemblement National*, where she assumed a position that is more favourable to gender equality, VOX uses women tactically in its discourse to set an anti-immigration agenda, promote an anti-multicultural model and demonstrate its aversion to the Muslim immigrant community. Women and the family are represented as potential victims at the hands of foreigners, so it will be native men who must protect women, and in turn, defend the nation. VOX accuses the other political parties of failing in their attempts to protect women from such attacks and offers an increase in sentences associated with these crimes as a solution. This excerpt from a VOX speech illustrates these arguments.

Members of parliament, especially female members of parliament, in twenty hours of debate not a single second in this House has been given to speaking out against the plague of gang rapes committed during the first days of this year, mainly by foreigners. (...) the data is public, that 69% of all men accused of gang rapes are foreigners, despite making up only 10% of the population. Ladies and gentlemen of the PSOE, the three Moroccans who sexually assaulted a young woman in Seville are now free. Ladies and gentlemen of Podemos, the group of Afghans —refugees, by the way— who raped three young women a few days ago in Murcia, are already free.

When is the demonstration? Where is your indignation?

[Parliamentary Record of the Congress of Deputies, 4th January 2020]

VOX's political ideology can be defined by its strong conservatism, its centralist nationalism, and its defence of nativism as fundamental foundational principles. These elements will undoubtedly make a change of discourse around immigration and gender equality unlikely. However, a discursive shift in relation to the acceptance of certain measures in support of equality between men and women would be more likely than a change in tone around certain types of immigration. VOX's manifesto and parliamentary speeches place greater emphasis on increasing immigration controls and hardening Spanish immigration policies than on issues derived from the fight against feminism as an ideology, although such issues are also present, associated with a defence of the traditional family and nationalist concern for the reproduction of the nation in demographic and cultural terms.

CONCLUSIONS

During the last few decades, a paradigm shift resulting from the crisis of liberal democracy can be seen in Europe. This political transformation is associated with the rise of anti-immigration parties and actors, and in parallel, with parties and social movements opposed to gender equality. Both phenomena, migration and gender studies, keep similarities and connections that exist between them by means of a case study into VOX, a Spanish radical right-wing political party, outlining arguments and identifying the intersection between the discourse related to both issues.

The research carried out into the discourse of VOX in relation to the role of women in Spanish society highlights the arguments: the family and traditional gender roles, especially that of mother, that are central to its ideology; Feminism is an ideology believed to be capable of destroying the institution of the family, thus it is necessary to eliminate the network of organizations that receive financial support to implement their idea of equality; and finally, the affirmation that men are discriminated against and denied equal treatment to women, for which their defence in litigation for gender violence, divorce, etc. is necessary.

In relation to VOX's position on immigration, four main strands of discourse stand out. First, an increase in border controls and

greater priority given to migrants from Latin America, with legal entry being conditional on the needs of the labour market. Second, the criminalization of immigrants in an irregular administrative situation that entails an increase in penalties, with this irregularity being considered a felony associated with an increase in crime and greater insecurity in Spain. The third argument is the demand for a greater effort to be made by immigrants in an irregular situation to integrate, accompanied by claims of Welfare State abuse, to which they call for access to be regulated, with priority given to nationals. And fourthly, a fight against Islam, personalized in its opposition to immigrants from countries of the Maghreb residing in Spain. These anti-immigration positions derive from a nativist ideological stance and a Spanish national identity that places nationals in a hegemonic position.

The results of the data analysed show that VOX makes an association between irregular immigration, mainly that of Muslims, and an increase in crime, specifically sexual violence against women. As it is by other European radical right-wing parties, Catholicism is praised as a cultural element rooted in Western civilization in contrast to Muslim societies where women enjoy fewer freedoms. Gender discourse is racialized to demonize the multicultural model associated with liberal values. In VOX we find a vision of women as potential victims of the foreign “other”, which is justified by a representation of them as beings oppressed by the primitive culture of the foreigner, and the need for them to be freed from this threat by native men, since their agency as social actors is withdrawn. Ultimately, the burden of cultural representation weighs on women, as they are viewed as the symbolic carriers of the identity and honour of the community (Yuval-Davis, 2004).

This article aims to contribute empirical evidence to the academic debate around the emergence of VOX, a new radical right-wing party, especially with regard to matters of gender equality and immigration. The contribution of the present research to the academic literature lies in its systematic analysis of the discourse of this political force, so recently incorporated into the party system in Spain, on migration and gender equality. The electoral success of VOX, that began in the 2018 Andalusian regional elections, and was confirmed in the 2019 European elections and the 2019 general elections, is so recent that extensive data is not yet available to delve more deeply into the impact of the appearance of this party. From the framework of gender and migration studies in Spain, this article

seeks to establish an academic arena at the European level that identifies the intersection that exists between the anti-immigration and anti-gender equality stances of radical right-wing political forces. A case study into VOX in Spain, will permit a comparison between this political force with other similar ones in Europe.

The present article leaves the door open to further research into the role of VOX in relation to the topics investigated. A line of research that could be developed in the future consists of an analysis of the extent to which VOX's incorporation into the establishment might result in an abandonment of its extremist positions, and a greater focus on positions related to gender equality and immigration. A gender gap has been identified in the electorate of radical right-wing parliamentary parties in other European countries. It is thus necessary to know if such a gender gap exists for VOX voters, does the party attract male voters in the main, and if so, what characteristic do they share?

And finally, further research into the impact or influence of the presence of VOX on the other parliamentary forces of the Spanish political spectrum would be beneficial, along with an investigation into the extent to which a political force like VOX is able to strengthen immigration policies and modify or reduce support for gender equality policies by means of their speeches and proposals.

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