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Spanish state

# Vox: the new face of the far right in the Spanish State

- IV Online magazine - 2018 - IV526 - November 2018 -

Publication date: Monday 26 November 2018

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**Until recently, Spain was uniquely free of neofascism. Not anymore.**

On September 7, the far-right party Vox filled Spain's Vistalegre arena with ten thousand nostalgists for Franco's regime, neofascists, Catholic extremists, and reactionaries of all kinds. [1] In organizing such a spectacle, Vox had good reason to choose this particular venue – that is, the same arena in which Podemos has held its own congresses. The far-right party staged its rally here in order to display its own strength.

Vox wanted to vaunt itself as the natural antagonist of the new left that has arisen from the 15M anti-austerity movement. And it succeeded. Since this event, the name Vox has appeared across the media, its leaders are in all the papers, and the party has begun to be taken seriously by opinion pollsters (rising from zero percent to around 5 percent in months).

The event at Vistalegre marks a turning point in Spanish politics: the rise of a new far right, in a country once considered an exception to the global fascist menace.

## Origins

Vox was created in 2013 under the leadership of Alejo Vidal Quadras, a former leader of the [Partido Popular](#) (PP) – the traditional party of the Spanish right. Quadras set Vox the explicit objective of rallying the right-wing voters disillusioned by the PP's policies. However, this operation did not take off as well as expected, and this right-wing vote critical of the PP was instead picked up by alternative forces with a less sharp ideological profile, such as Ciudadanos or the Unión Progreso y Democracia (though this latter has now almost disappeared).

This failure brought the first crisis in Vox; having advocated closer relations with these other center-right forces, its founder-president Quadras soon left the party, which was now reorganized on new bases. In September 2014 Santiago Abascal became party president (a role he still holds) and began to shift the party from more traditionally conservative positions to a new reactionary far right: a shift aligned to other global phenomena, and yet one which also has some unmistakably Spanish characteristics.

Vox's ideas link up with the reactionary wave spreading worldwide. It expresses a powerful hatred against the traditions of the Left; its anticommunism (against the Reds) translates into attacks against the fantastical menace of cultural Marxism. Its militants claim that this latter has colonized the minds of citizens, thus threatening the values underpinning Spain's cohesion.

One of the main targets of Vox's rage is the feminist and LGBTQ movements, which it accuses of organizing brainwashing in the lecture theaters and in media supposedly hegemonized by identity politics. Asserting its own politically incorrect bona fides and claiming itself the victim of progressive censorship, Vox paints itself in the colors of the white Spanish producer who dutifully gets up to work every morning, and who – whether boss or worker – sees himself threatened by hordes of migrants coming to steal his job.

With the political left exhausted and lacking in ideas that go beyond managing the system, Vox will try to position itself as a reactionary alternative to the existing political system.

However, Vox maintains the fundamental traits of Spanish conservatism. The Spanish fascist tradition has never

allowed itself too many "revolutionary" hues. The founder of the [Falange Española](#), Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, and General Franco always sought to adopt a more "reactionary" than "revolutionary" discourse.

These figures have much to do with the fact that since its origins, Spanish fascism's main task has been to organize the counterrevolution against the Left, in a country whose social formation means that the petty bourgeoisie and the middle classes have always been deeply tied to the ruling class's and the aristocracy's political structure. Apart from certain minorities of little wider import, Spanish fascism has always been royalist, looking to the king for a traditional source of legitimacy than other European fascisms sought elsewhere.

Another ideological matrix that establishes a family relationship between Vox and this national-reactionary tradition is its defence of an inheritance of *hispanidad* ("Spanishness"). Though few still remember it, Spain certainly was once a global empire, which conquered America and half of Europe in blood and fire. Though this legacy is hard to lay claim to, even in terms of development (the imperial monarchy was but a parasitical excrescence, based on military blunder, religious colonialism and the under-development of the productive forces), it operates as a Spanish version of Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again," albeit with a much lesser material basis in present-day realities.

This is a neo-imperialism lacking in imperial scope, which thus ends up directing these frustrated desires toward a sharpened Spanish nationalism within the domestic context: Galicians, Basques, and, today, Catalan independentists are "together with the "Reds" the enemies par excellence which the Spanish right's project is built around. Vox itself could take advantage of a certain disaffection with regard to the traditional right, which was accused of being overly "soft" on an internal enemy seen as having been on the offensive across the recent turbulent spell in Spanish politics.

## Possible Advance

What we do know for sure is that it is still too early to say how the Vox phenomenon is going to play out. The pollsters still give it relatively low scores (the ones giving it the highest percentages rate it at 5 percent of the vote). Yet its sudden breakthrough has already had immediate effects, allowing us to guess at some of the ways that it may develop in future.

Vox has grown up on the margins of official politics. Its leaders have had to get by attention-seeking in a political market already saturated with conflicts and an over-supply of alternatives. But they have skillfully operated in the world of civil society, building organizations and think tanks with which to relate to various sections of the Right.

The godfather of this world is the former prime minister Jose María Aznar, a close admirer of George W. Bush, [whom he accompanied](#) in the doom-laden adventure in Iraq. Aznar and the whole neoconservative sector he represents have spent years living apart from the political front line, embittered as they are by the PP leadership under prime minister Mariano Rajoy (before he was deposed from this office a few months ago by a motion of censure driven by the Left and the pro-independence parties, [thus returning](#) the Spanish Socialist Workers Party [PSOE], the historic social-democratic party, to power). And yet even then, this neoconservative sector continued to work on the underground, in an ideological recomposition of the political right.

This place "on the edges" has allowed Vox to appear with an anti-establishment discourse, even though its leaders are people who come . . . from the establishment. For example, Aznar (who remains a member of the Partido Popular) has himself called Vox chief Santiago Abascal "a guy full of talent."

But Vox has not stopped at building up legitimacy among influential circles on the Right. It has also begun to deploy an activist accumulation strategy, trying to penetrate working-class districts by whipping up fear of immigration and opposition to the Left's policies. For example, in Usera – long one of the most working-class districts of Madrid – Vox has used very aggressive tactics, packing out the meetings at the [left-wing] city hall and especially virulently attacking the district councilor [Rommy Arce](#), who is the first migrant woman to become a councilor in the Spanish capital.

The active mobilization of resentment against what Vox considers intolerable (a Marxist, feminist, migrant woman of working-class background holding office) will remind many of the old tactics of the European far right, which mobilized middle-class layers in poor districts to put back in their place any socialists who achieved a position of power. This markedly reactionary orientation does limit Vox's own electoral potential, but also provides its very basis. According to pollsters its voters are high-income, white men; it has not yet managed to penetrate working-class, migrant, or female electorates.

Vox has also had other more immediate effects on Spanish politics. If in other European countries, liberal democracies' very DNA was founded on the fight against fascism, Spanish democracy was not constituted by any similar birth process. Rather, this democracy was the fruit of a pact between the heirs of the dictator Franco and the forces of the Left. For this reason, the Right has never condemned Francoism, but rather continued on from it. This means that Vox has many points in common with the traditional parties of the Right.

In fact, the young Partido Popular leader Pablo Casado – himself an Aznar protégé – has already made several nods to Vox in interviews, not least by refusing to term it a far-right party; he has had no similar problem chucking all manner of epithets at Podemos. Moreover, Vox's breakthrough has caused a right-wing radicalization of both the Partido Popular and Ciudadanos, who have entered into a spiraling competition to advance authoritarian measures against migrants, feminism, workers' organizations, and Catalan independentists.

Up until recently, Spain had been one of the few European countries the new far right had not yet reached. But Vox's breakthrough marks the end of the so-called Spanish exception. Discontent with the system had expressed itself through the 15M austerity movement, Podemos, and progressive local politics. But this new left opted for a strategy of moderation, as it sought a governmental pact with social democracy – a choice reminiscent of the French Communist Party's failed 1980s experiment in [François Mitterand's Socialist-led government](#).

With the political left exhausted and lacking in ideas that go beyond managing the system (notwithstanding the existence of a powerful feminist movement and a dynamic movement for the right to housing, as well as incipient workers' struggles) the far right as represented by Vox will try to position itself as a reactionary alternative to the existing political system.

Not all is lost: the forces do also exist to prevent the growth of the global fascist monster, and to avoid a disaster like the ones our brothers and sisters have suffered in Brazil and the United States. But we cannot deny that this monster has indeed arrived in Spain.

Original source **Jacobin** "[Spain's New Old Monster](#)".

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[1] *El Pais* 8 October 2018 "[La extrema derecha de Vox llena Vistalegre con más de 9.000 simpatizantes](#)".