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They shall not pass? The role of supply-side factors in the electoral breakthrough of VOX and Chega

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ABSTRACT

No country is immune to the electoral success of populist radical right (PRR) parties: Spain and Portugal seemed to be the exception to this rule because, for decades, PRR parties remained relegated to the margins of the Iberian political systems. However, in 2019 VOX and Chega gained parliamentary representation: how did they manage to obtain their historic electoral breakthrough? From a supply-side perspective, we use the Party Manifesto dataset to show that VOX and Chega chose to position themselves within the existing political space and cleavages in ways that set them apart from the competition. VOX exploited the Spanish centre-periphery cleavage insisting on strong nationalist elements while advocating for increased centralization, while Chega insisted on personal freedom and welfare limitation to break the ties with the political system born out of the Carnation Revolution.


KEYWORDS

Populist radical right; Iberia; VOX; Chega; supply

1. Introduction

Populist radical right (PRR) parties, combining authoritarianism, nativism and populism (Mudde, 2007), have obtained significant electoral success and participated in coalition governments across Europe in recent years. The progressive normalization of PRR parties is taking place across Europe (Brown et al., 2023; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Wodak, 2021), even in countries previously considered immune to the electoral breakthrough of PRR parties.¹ For decades, Spain and Portugal seemed to constitute *exceptions*, as PRR parties remained unsuccessful (Lisi et al., 2019). This was so much at odds with the process of normalization of radical and extreme right-wing parties across Europe (Hainsworth, 2000) that scholars used the term *Iberian exceptionalism* (Heyne & Manucci, 2021; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). A generally accepted argument to make sense of this exceptional situation, was that the stigmatization of the authoritarian regimes was strong to the point that the two countries were ‘vaccinated’ against authoritarian tendencies and the electoral breakthrough of PRR parties (Encarnación, 2004; Marchi, 2013).

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As a result of this stigma, both Spaniards and Portuguese voters position themselves more to the left than other countries – to the point that the Portuguese party system is usually defined as ‘biased leftwards’ (Bruneau & Macleod, 1986) – while placing the main right-wing party of the country further to the right than their policy stances would suggest (Dinas, 2017). PRR parties in Portugal and Spain must also overcome a strong stigmatization in order to experience an electoral breakthrough (Dinas & Northmore-Ball, 2020; Martín et al., 2022), and the internalization of this norm contributed to the electoral failure of PRR parties in Spain and Portugal until the 2019 elections (M. S. Mendes & Dennison, 2021; Valentim, 2021).

The electoral breakthrough of VOX and Chega in 2019 confirms that the two countries are comparable and follow similar trajectories. Historically, Spain and Portugal had similar roles in the early stages of European colonization, the emergence of liberalism in the nineteenth century and unstable republics in the early twentieth century (Fishman & Lizardo, 2013). Moreover, the two countries share comparable political and electoral systems, as well as several socio-economic and political institutional features (Lisi, 2015). As already mentioned, both countries experienced extremely long-lasting, right-wing authoritarian regimes. The regimes were stigmatized to the point that PRR parties remained unsuccessful for decades after the democratic transitions, which began within a few months of each other: April 1974 in Portugal, November 1975 in Spain (Manucci, 2020). Finally, both Spain and Portugal were hit by the Great Recession, when the austerity measures imposed by European institutions brought severe socio-economic costs (Salmon, 2017). The electoral breakthrough of VOX and Chega, however, was surprising and can only be understood by placing it in the political context that characterized the 2019 elections in Spain and Portugal.

Therefore, this article sets out to explain the electoral breakthrough of VOX and Chega from a supply-side perspective. It does so by analysing the ways in which these two parties strategically positioned themselves in the existing space of competition (Kitschelt, 1995) at the 2019 national elections, when they obtained their electoral breakthrough. To do so, the paper is structured as follows. The next section explains how the interaction between demand- and supply-side factors can favour the electoral breakthrough of PRR parties, focusing on the political space of competition and cleavages present in Spain in Portugal. It follows a methodological section, describing the case selection, and the variables used from the Manifesto Project for the analysis. The next section presents a qualitative reading of the party manifestos presented by VOX and Chega at the 2019 elections. Then, relying on the data from the Party Manifesto dataset follows a comparative analysis of their strategic position within the political space in which they compete. The conclusions discuss the possible future for PRR parties to thrive in the Iberian Peninsula.

2. PRR parties breaking through: A story of demand and supply

To identify VOX and Chega as PRR parties we rely on the PopuList, a dataset of parties that, through expert surveys, classify parties as populist, Eurosceptic, far right and far left (Rooduijn et al., 2020).² According to the PopuList, both VOX and Chega are populist and far right, an umbrella term that includes radical and extreme right parties (Mudde, 2019). Additionally, several sources label VOX and Chega as PRR parties because they present

the three elements that characterize this party family: populism, nativism, and authoritarianism (e.g. Mendes, 2021; Rama et al., 2021). PRR parties face unfavourable institutional conditions in the two countries. For example, both Portugal and Spain have enjoyed stable two-party systems and no viable political space beyond the mainstream right seemed to exist since the democratic transition (Muñoz, 2009). Moreover, Chega and VOX succeeded despite an unfavourable electoral system that is supposed to penalize newer and smaller parties (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015). Moreover, considering the strong stigma that PRR parties traditionally face in the Iberian Peninsula since the democratization processes of the 1970s, these two parties were not supposed to achieve any electoral success in Spain and Portugal.

This was indeed the case until 2019, when VOX became the third most voted party in Spain, winning 28 seats and 15.1 per cent of the votes, further confirming its position at the 2023 elections. The same year, Chega was the first radical right party to obtain a seat in the Portuguese parliament with 1.3 per cent of the vote share. In 2021, Chega's leader André Ventura came third at the presidential elections (11.9 per cent of the votes) and the party confirmed its relevance at the 2022 snap election, coming third again (7.2 per cent of the votes). VOX and Chega achieved something that, in the Iberian Peninsula, no other PRR party managed to obtain since the democratic transition of the 1970s: representation in the national parliament. To make sense of this electoral breakthrough, we rely on the relevant literature, which frames the electoral breakthrough of PRR parties as the interaction between demand- and supply-side factors (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; Eatwell, 2003; Mols & Jetten, 2020; Rydgren, 2007).

The demand side focuses on economic and cultural grievances that create an electoral demand for PRR parties, whereas the supply side considers how these parties act within the political opportunity structure and the political space left open by the competitors (Golder, 2016). In turn, the supply side can be divided between internal and external (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). On the one hand, the external supply includes elements outside of the sphere of influence of political parties (e.g. institutional framework, political space, and media environment). On the other hand, the internal supply has to do with elements on which the party has direct influence (e.g. ideology, strategic positioning, and leadership).³

In line with the relevant literature on the topic, we expect the electoral breakthrough of VOX and Chega to derive from the ability of these parties to provide representation (supply) to an electorate that, on certain issues, was looking for parties that reflected their position on salient issues (demand). The key is the interaction between demand and supply because, in isolation, these two aspects fail to shed a light on such a complex phenomenon. Indeed, radical and extreme right parties participated in national elections for decades, always failing to break through, indicating that a supply of this kind of parties already existed before VOX and Chega (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015). The demand was there too: populist attitudes exist both in Spain (Marcos-Marne et al., 2020) and Portugal (Santana-Pereira & Cancela, 2021), racism – both cultural and biological – in Spain and Portugal is above average compared to the other European countries (Ramos et al., 2019), and positive evaluations of the authoritarian past are all but rare in the two countries (Aguilar Fernández, 2009; Hite & Morlino, 2004; Santana-Pereira et al., 2016). Despite favourable conditions, as well as the existence of both demand and supply, the radical right always failed to break through in Spain and Portugal (Alonso & Rovira

Kaltwasser, 2015; Mendes, 2021). The reason behind the electoral breakthrough of VOX and Chega must therefore lie at the intersection between voters' preferences and strategic positioning of the parties within the existing political space and cleavages present in the two countries.

2.1. Political space and cleavages

To understand the electoral breakthrough of VOX and Chega it is necessary to examine the role of political cleavages as well as the context of the 2019 elections in Spain and Portugal. Cleavages refer to the permanent political divisions among citizens (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), while contextual factors – including external shocks – can at times increase the demand for these parties. In a context formed by permanent as well as volatile factors, all parties strategically position themselves vis-à-vis competitors and adopt an electoral manifesto that will offer the party the best chance to win over voters (Akkerman et al., 2016).

Herbert Kitschelt identified a 'winning formula' that allows PRR parties to appeal to large segments of the electorate by combining neoliberal and exclusionist authoritarian appeals (1995). However, PRR parties do not always adopt the new formula (De Lange, 2007), and overall the economic dimension of PRR parties continued to fluctuate strategically over time and according to the context (Harteveld, 2016; Rovny, 2013). Indeed, long-term cleavages interact with contextual factors in forming the political and discursive opportunity structures in which all parties exercise their political agency (Pytlas, 2015). For this reason, a large literature shows that, to attract voters, PRR parties strategically adapt their message and electoral manifestos (Breyer, 2022; Enggist & Pinggera, 2022; Rovny & Polk, 2020). Consequently, to shed a light on the electoral breakthrough of VOX and Chega it is necessary to observe how they positioned themselves in the political space characterizing the 2019 elections and within the more permanent cleavages present in the two countries.

The Spanish political system is structured along a cleavage between the centre of the country and its periphery, in a constant tension between regional autonomy and centralization of power (Morlino, 1998). This cleavage was supposed to explain the failure of PRR parties (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015) because the Partido Popular (People's Party – PP) managed to monopolize nationalist sentiments and restricting the electoral space for PRR parties (Llamazares & Ramiro, 2006). Things started changing, however, after the 2017 referendum about the Catalan independence.

During the 2019 electoral campaign, the Catalan issue concerning regional autonomy was a very salient topic, at the heart of a very polarized debate about regionalism, independence, and centralization (Rama et al., 2021; Vampa, 2020). In this scenario, nationalist sentiments were reactivated, contributing to the formation of favourable opportunity structures for VOX that was able to attract voters who wanted a reaffirmation of the centrality of the state (M. S. Mendes & Dennison, 2021; Turnbull-Dugarte et al., 2020). Moreover, in 2019 the exhumation of Francisco Franco's body and the riots in Catalonia added to the saliency of territorial conflict, thus boosting the electoral performance VOX (Simón, 2021).⁴

The Portuguese cleavage system, on the other hand, is structured along a different type of conflict. Ending almost half a century of authoritarian rule, the Carnation

Revolution restricted the range of legitimate options and, rather than the traditional left-right cleavage, introduced in the Portuguese party system a cleavage about different interpretations of democracy and regime preferences between the radical left and the mainstream parties (Jalali, 2004, pp. 93–95). Until the first important constitutional revision in 1982 it was even unclear what kind of democracy should be installed and considered legitimate in Portugal: a radical socialist regime or a pluralist democracy (Morlino, 1998). The durable cleavage structuring the Portuguese party competition is therefore revolving around socioeconomic issues rather than material ones (Ferreira da Silva & Mendes, 2019).

In line with this cleavage structure, we know that the most salient issue at the 2019 Portuguese elections was the system of pensions and welfare provisions (Gómez-Reino & Plaza-Colodro, 2018), with a particular focus on health and social security (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020). In Spring 2019, according to Eurobarometer, the most salient topics for 44 per cent of Portuguese people were the health system and social security (the EU average was 23 per cent).⁵ The data collected by the Portuguese electoral studies based on representative surveys (Lobo et al., 2023) shows the existence of a demand, among the Portuguese population, for the reduction of welfare support and the privatization of public services several years before Chega's electoral breakthrough. In 2011, 18.70 per cent of the respondents wanted the health system to be controlled by the private sector (in 2015 it slightly decreased to 17.27 per cent). In 2015, 34.93 per cent of the respondents wanted to decrease taxes, even if that meant decreasing public services and welfare (in 2019 it was still very high, at 26.4 per cent). Finally, in 2011, 33.57 per cent of the respondents wanted the state to spend less on welfare (in 2015 it lowered to a non-negligible 9.40 per cent). Crucially, we know that Chega voters significantly prefer to privatize public services compared to the rest of the Portuguese electorate (Heyne & Manucci, 2021). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the failure of PRR parties in Portugal was linked to the presence of a popular demand that did not meet any credible supply (Santana-Pereira & Cancela, 2021), especially when it comes to issues linked to welfare expenditures and the privatization of public services.

Considering all the factors illustrated above, it is possible to hypothesize that VOX strategically positioned itself on the centralization issue in ways that sets it apart from the competition (and PP in particular), while Chega strategically positioned itself on the welfare provision issues in ways that sets it apart from the competition. To test this hypothesis, we will analyse the Manifesto Project data to illustrate (i) the political space of competition of the two Iberian countries and (ii) how VOX and Chega strategically positioned themselves within this space.

3. Methodology

The dataset provided by the Manifesto Project constitutes the best way to analyse the supply-side and strategic positioning of political parties over time and across countries. The Manifesto Project studies parties' policy preferences by analysing parties' election manifestos. The collection of the manifestos and their analysis relies on coders and provides detailed information about the policy preferences of more than 1000 parties from 1945 in over 50 countries. This allows studying the role of parties at different stages of

the political process and to study the programmatic supply of parties. For this study we used the version 2021a of the dataset (Volkens et al., 2021a).⁶

The manifestos analysed refer to the October 2019 elections in Spain, and the November 2019 elections in Portugal. In Spain, the April 2019 elections resulted in the failure of the negotiations between the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and Unidas Podemos to form a government, therefore the November manifesto has been selected instead. Chega published a new manifesto in 2021, but the 2019 manifesto has been chosen for several reasons. First, the Manifesto Project dataset did not include the 2021 manifesto at the time of writing. Second, the 2021 programme was not released in the context of an election, and therefore it lacks a certain strategic component. Third, selecting two manifestos that appeared in the same context, within a few weeks of distance, introduces a higher degree of comparability.

The Manifesto Project provides the percentages of sentences that each party manifesto devotes to a certain topic, also considering the direction (positive or negative) of the parties' position when relevant. Therefore, the Manifesto Project dataset allows studying in detail the dimensions that were most relevant in the context of the 2019 elections in the two countries, namely centralization in Spain and welfare in Portugal. Moreover, the dataset contains variables that describe other dimensions of the strategic positioning

Table 1. Manifesto project variables.

Variable code	Variable name	Description
per109	Internationalism: negative	Negative references to international co-operation. Favourable mentions of national sovereignty
per201	Freedom and human rights	Favourable mentions of importance of personal freedom and civil rights
per202	Democracy	Favourable mentions of democracy
per204	Constitutionalism: Negative	Opposition to the entirety or specific aspects of the constitution
per301	Decentralisation	Support for federalism or decentralization of political and/or economic power.
per302	Centralization	Opposition to political decision-making at lower political levels. Support for unitary government and for more centralization
per304	Political corruption	Need to eliminate political corruption and clientelism
per504	Welfare state expansion	Favourable mentions of any public social service or social security scheme.
per505	Welfare state limitation	Limiting state expenditures on social services/security. Favourable mentions of the social subsidiary principle
per601	National way of life: positive	Favourable mentions of the country's nation and history (including appeals to nationalism and patriotism)
per603	Traditional morality: positive	Favourable mentions of traditional and/or religious moral values (including traditional family)
per605	Law & Order: positive	Favourable mentions of strict law enforcement and tougher actions against domestic crime
per608	Multiculturalism: negative	The enforcement or encouragement of cultural integration. Appeals for cultural homogeneity in society.
per201_1*	Freedom	Favourable mentions of importance of personal freedom (including freedom from state coercion and bureaucratic control, importance of individualism)
per202_1*	Democracy general: positive	Favourable mentions of democracy (including the involvement of all citizens in political decision making)
per601_2*	National Way of Life: Immigration: Negative	Statement advocating the restriction of the process of immigration, i.e. accepting new immigrants.
per608_2*	Multiculturalism: Immigrants Assimilation	Calls for immigrants that are in the country to adopt the manifesto country's culture and fully assimilate. Reinforce integration.

* Note that these variables are only available for the 2019 elections.

offered by VOX and Chega, such as e.g. law and order, nationalism, democracy, and multiculturalism. Details about the coding procedure can be found in the codebook (Werner et al., 2021).

All the variables that are used in the analysis are reported in Table 1, while the details about the variables can be found in the codebook (Volkens et al., 2021b). The analysis will concern the salience that Chega and VOX devote to a variety of topics in three different scenarios. First, it will compare VOX and Chega with all the other right-wing parties that obtained representation in the 2019 elections: Partido Social Demócrata (PSD), CDS-Partido Popular (CDS-PP), and Iniciativa Liberal (IL) in Portugal, Ciudadanos (C's) and Partido Popular (PP) in Spain. Second, it will compare VOX and Chega with *all* the parties that gained electoral representation in the two countries in the 2019 elections. Third, it will place VOX and Chega in the context of all the parties included in the Manifesto Project dataset for the two countries, therefore providing information about all parties that gained representation in the Iberian Peninsula since the democratic transitions of the mid-1970s. Table A1 in the supplementary material shows the full name of each party that appears in the figures, where for reasons of space only the abbreviations are reported. The next section presents a qualitative reading of the two electoral manifestos on which the analysis will be based.

4. Electoral manifestos 2019

In 2019, VOX and Chega published two electoral manifestos that were similar in some regards but also different in others. A difference that immediately stands out is the length: Chega's manifesto is more than double than VOX's. This is due to the presence of a long introduction about the 'ideological background' of the party that takes almost half of the space. Below are presented the most salient characteristics of the two manifestos, while the next section will show how this places VOX and Chega within the ideological space of Spain and Portugal.

4.1. VOX

The manifesto begins by discussing issues linked to the centre-periphery cleavage, with a section on Spanish 'unity and sovereignty' which projects the Catalan issue at the very top of the priorities of the party. The Spanish flag, anthem, language, and crown are the national symbols to be respected and protected (p. 2). Then, VOX argues that it is important to celebrate the feats of the Spanish 'national heroes', proposes to abrogate the 2007 Historical Memory Law – which provided reparations for the victims of persecution or violence during the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship – and concludes that it is essential to celebrate whoever fought for Spain, no matter on what side, therefore including fascism (p. 3). National unity and historical revisionism go hand in hand, constituting the main pillars upon which VOX builds its own narrative. The continuity with Francisco Franco's regime is obvious without being explicitly declared.

The manifesto continues with a section proposing to change the electoral law and a section on the dangers of immigration, with various ways to reduce it and make migrants' lives harder (pp. 5-6). It follows a part about the defence of the country's borders, where Islamic fundamentalism and the 'Jihadist threat' are described as the main concerns, and

in this context Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish enclaves in Northern Africa, are seen as crucial assets (p. 7). The section about health follows a welfare chauvinist approach, arguing that illegal migrants should not have access to free health care, but also insists that surgeries that are not strictly about health (such as abortion and gender-affirming surgery) should not be covered by the public health system (p. 14). The section on education and culture insists once again on the centrality of the Spanish language, both domestically and internationally, and proposes a law protecting bullfighting as part of the Spanish cultural heritage (p. 15).

The section on 'life and family' displays the party's position in defence of what they call 'natural family', while fighting against 'radical feminist organizations', abortion, and 'false allegations' of gender violence (p. 17). Accordingly, they propose to abolish the existing law on gender violence and propose instead a law on 'intrafamilial violence', protecting not only women but also men, old people, and kids. Interestingly, this proposal is present also on Chega's manifesto, phrased in the same exact way. On 'freedom and justice' (p. 20) the party, among other things, claims that it is necessary to put the needs of Spain and the Spanish people before the interests of oligarchies, lobbies, and supranational organizations (this populist sentence appears in the same exact way in Chega's manifesto, p. 39). Moreover, it advances the idea of a law and a memorial for the victims of terrorism, intended both as Islamist and as separatist.

4.2. Chega

Chega's manifesto for 2019 is much longer than the one from VOX, and this is mostly because of a long introduction about the 'ideological background' of the party. At pages 4-21, the document articulates a detailed reflection about the role of freedom as opposed to the tyranny of communism and globalism, proposing to establish a 'fourth Republic' based on a new constitution. According to the first section, Chega opposes the political order created in Portugal by the Carnation Revolution and the resulting 1976 constitution.

The party claims that the Carnation Revolution instituted a tyranny against private property, life, and traditions, whereas liberalism is the only hope to restore the country's freedom. In Chega's view, the 1974 revolution produced a political system based on the acceptance of a Marxist mythology, thus originating a 'limited democracy'. What they propose instead, is a 'neutral' state based on a 'neutral' constitution voted by the people. This new social contract will enable the citizens to free themselves from the yoke of the state's 'tentacular power'. Interestingly, Chega claims that the 'Marxist madness' that followed the French Revolution imposed an artificial equality, and that cultural Marxism is now dominant within academia, art, the media, and the elites (p. 10). The 'globalist ideology' is therefore seen as the result of the hegemony of cultural Marxism and 'political correctness', with the result that people have been reduced to an amorphous mass subjected to the censorship and slavery imposed by a *Big Brother*. Individualism and personalism are considered the best remedies to this situation.

It is crucial to observe that Chega's new social contract mostly aims at reforming welfare provisions. Indeed, Chega considers social welfare to be the undesirable result of the 1974 revolution's Marxist bias: the party claims that welfare state currently helps those who do not deserve it, while leaving behind those who face real difficulties. In

this view, the state should stop acting like a *Robin Hood*, but simply act as an ‘impartial referee’ that allows everyone to become richer (p. 18).

The second section presents the political programme itself (pp. 23–51), which once again starts with an attack to the left, the political landscape produced by the Carnation revolution, and the 1976 constitution. Chega proposes the introduction of a presidential regime, as well as the reduction of the number of MPs and ministers. The party promises to end the ‘fiscal extortion’ practiced by the ‘invasive state’ and to introduce the principle that citizens are customers who need to pay the state for the services they require. Concerning life and family, Chega follows very closely the proposals of VOX, insisting on the protection of the ‘natural family’, the fight against abortion, same-sex marriages, ‘gender ideology’ and ‘LGBTI propaganda’ (p. 31). Chega promises that the money saved for abortion and gender-affirming surgery will go to ‘real health care’.

While in VOX’s manifesto the ideological and political continuity with the authoritarian regime is more visible, also Chega establishes a link to *Estado Novo* and the colonial past. For example, when Chega claims that abandoning the country’s ‘positions’ in Africa after 1975 was a mistake (p. 34). Like VOX, Chega proposes to celebrate the country’s heroes (p. 43), claims that it is important to preserve, ‘without circumstantial revisionism’, the original onomastics and toponymy of historic monuments and streets and to teach Portuguese history without ‘revisionist interferences’, while proposing to open a museum of *discoveries*.

On cultural issues, Chega’s manifesto resembles VOX’s. They wish to stop the ‘overwhelming wave of illegal migrants’ (p. 36) and to be vigilant against ‘uncontrolled migrations’ (p. 39), propose chemical castration for sexual crimes (p. 37), cut funding to ‘radical feminist organisations’ (p. 38), and to fight fundamentalist Islam (p. 40) while making it more difficult for migrants to obtain the citizenship and easier to lose it.

The manifesto ends with another section on the ‘neutral’ role of the state, that must act as an arbitrator and regulator substituting welfare state with free market, thus setting Chega apart from communists, socialists, social democrats and even Christian democrats (p. 45). In this light, they propose that housing should not be considered a right (p. 46) and claim that both the health system and social security should be privatized (pp. 49–50).

5. VOX and Chega in the Iberian political space

We can now determine, thanks to the Manifesto Project dataset, how VOX and Chega strategically positioned themselves within the Iberian political space and the existing political cleavages. The key element to make sense of the breakthrough of PRR parties in Spain and Portugal consists in determining how VOX and Chega chose to exploit the space left free by the competing political parties on particularly important issues in the context of the 2019 elections.

Figure 1 shows the main similarities and differences between VOX and Chega, expressed in the percentage of sentences that they devote to different topics in their 2019 manifestos. They both prefer national sovereignty to international co-operation, endorse traditional moral values (including the traditional family structure) and oppose corruption, propose strict law enforcement and tougher actions against domestic crime, while expressing their support for democracy (including the involvement of all citizens in political decision-making).⁷

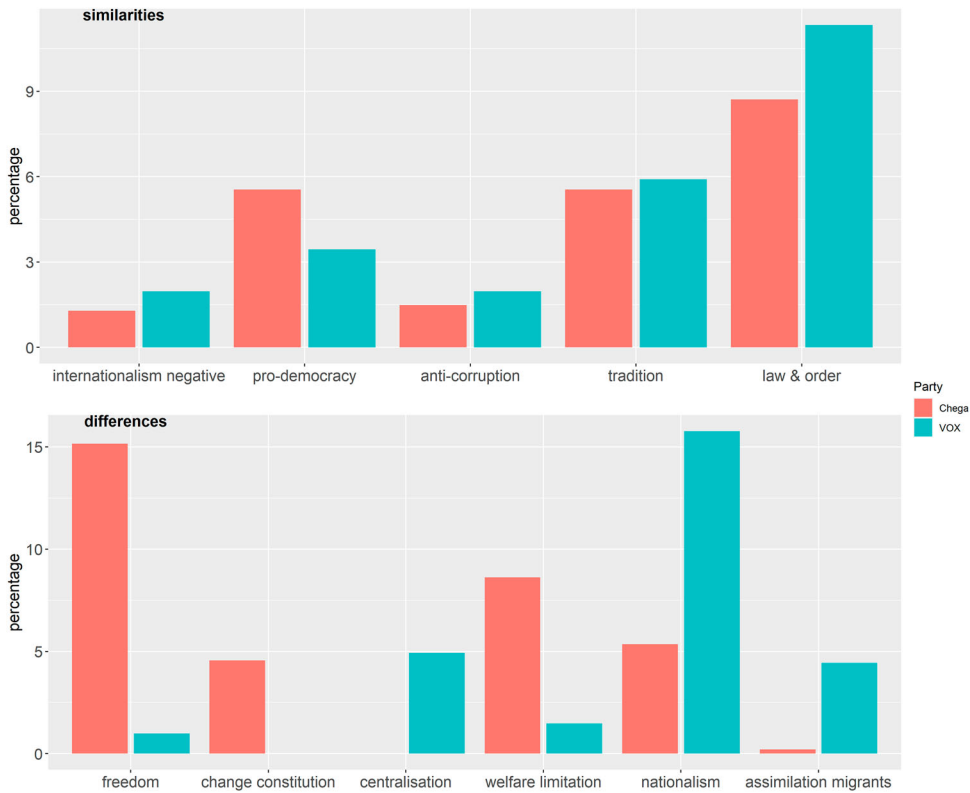


Figure 1. Similarities and differences between VOX and Chega.

At the same time, the two parties significantly differ in several ways. Chega insists on personal freedom, the necessity to change the constitution, and wants to limit state expenditures on social services and social security.⁸ VOX is much more nationalist than Chega, it strongly supports a unitary government and the centralization of political and administrative procedures, while claiming that the immigrants that are already in the country should adopt Spanish culture and fully assimilate.⁹

Next, it is possible to observe the positioning of VOX and Chega within the national cleavages described above. [Figure 2](#) contains data about the importance of centralization and decentralization for all Spanish parties since the 1977 elections present in the Comparative Manifesto database (173 manifestos) and for all Portuguese parties since the 1975 elections (111 manifestos). Unsurprisingly, this issue is almost irrelevant in Portugal, while it is extremely polarising in Spain. It is possible to notice how VOX stands for centralization and national unity, while opposing decentralization and autonomy at the sub-national level, like no other party in Spanish history (with the only exception of Ciudadanos in April and November 2019).

[Figure 3](#) shows an aspect of the Portuguese cleavage between liberal and illiberal democracy, namely Chega's idea that the Portuguese citizens are not free because of the legacy of the Carnation Revolution and the left-wing left ideology that characterized it. Plotting the importance of personal freedom and support for democracy for the right-wing parties in 2019, all parties in 2019 (16 in Spain and 10 in Portugal), and all parties

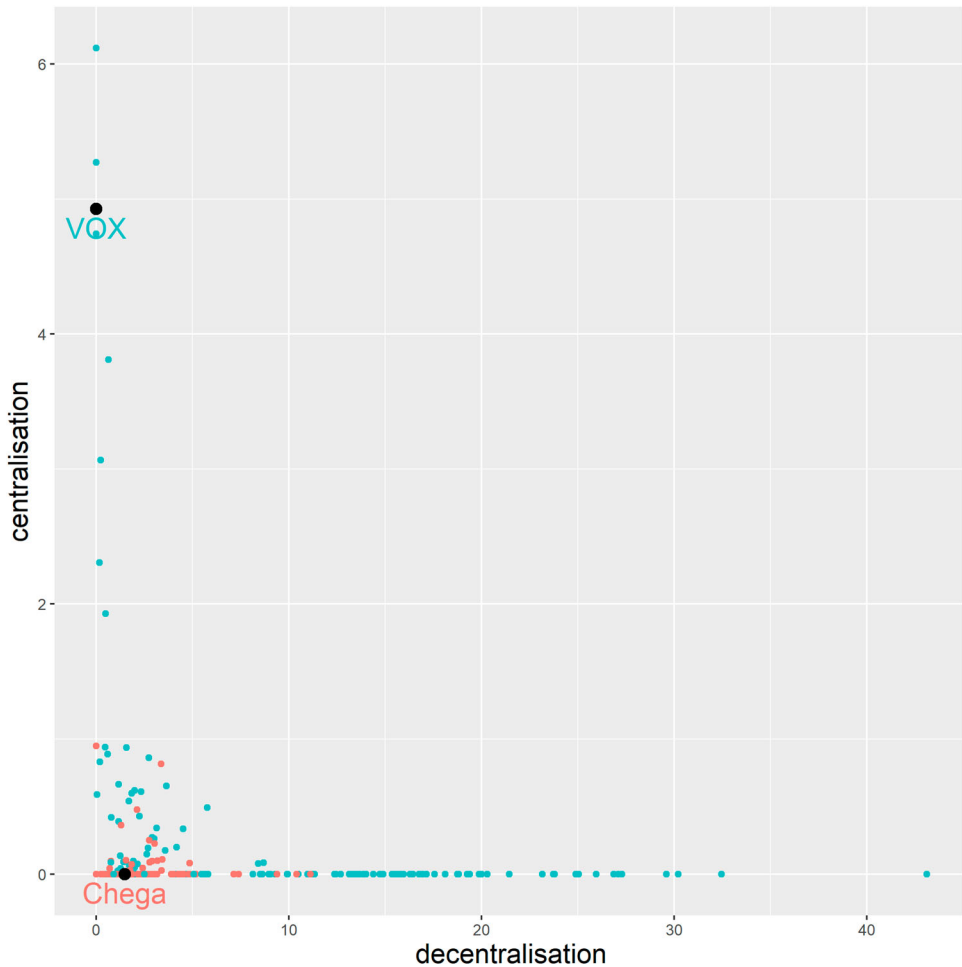


Figure 2. Salience of centralization and decentralization.

since the democratic transition (for a total of 284 manifestos), it appears that democracy for Chega has an average salience. What clearly stands out, however, is the crucial role that freedom has for Chega, and the qualitative analysis offered above makes it clear that for Chega freedom means opposition to the left-wing, Marxist, and globalist tyranny created in Portugal by the Carnation Revolution and the 1976 constitution. Since the 1970s, only three Iberian manifestos devote a higher attention to the importance of freedom. The 1975 PSD manifesto, when the party (still called Popular Democratic Party) had to distance itself from the previous authoritarian regime and build its democratic credentials (Pinto, 2006), as well as the 2015 and 2016 manifestos from the Basque Country Unite (EH Bildu), a nationalist and pro-independence political coalition, successor to the political arm of the armed Basque-separatist movement known as the ETA.

Figure 4 further illustrates the exceptional positioning of VOX in the Spanish political space when it comes to nationalism and the importance of traditional values. Concerning the importance of moral values and of the traditional family, both VOX and Chega score

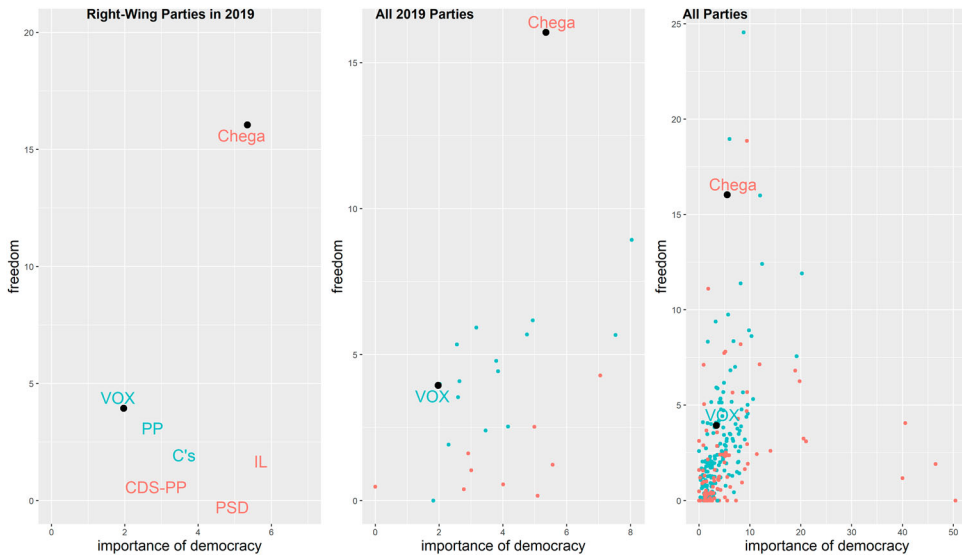


Figure 3. Salience of freedom and democracy.

very high compared to the competitors not only in the 2019 elections, but also in comparison to all the parties since the democratic transition. Where they present a significant difference, however, is in their degree of nationalism. Although in 2019 Chega presented the most nationalist manifesto in the history of post-1974 Portugal, VOX still devotes three times more space to patriotic and nationalist appeals.

Figure 5 shows the position of each party about the necessity to limit or expand welfare state. Although VOX presented the manifesto with the highest attention to

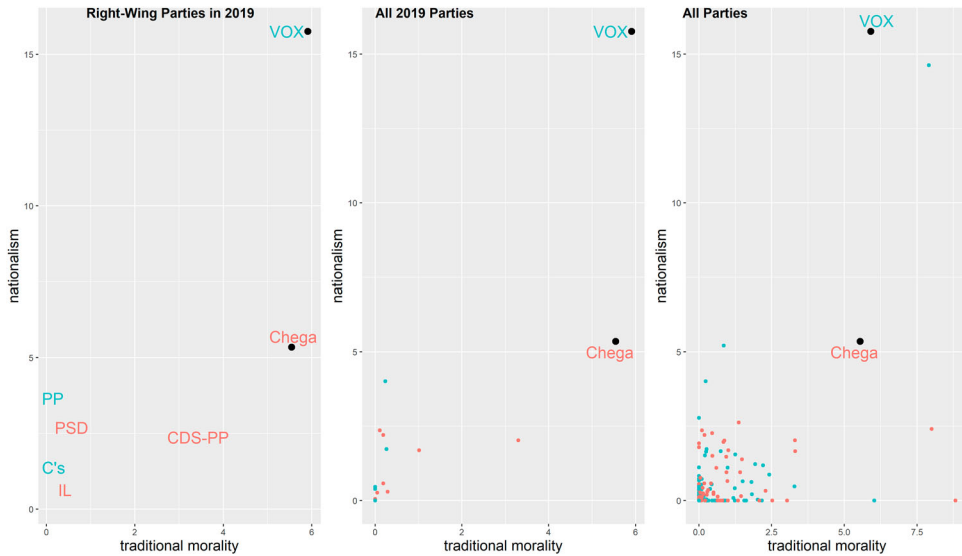


Figure 4. Salience of nationalism and traditional morality.

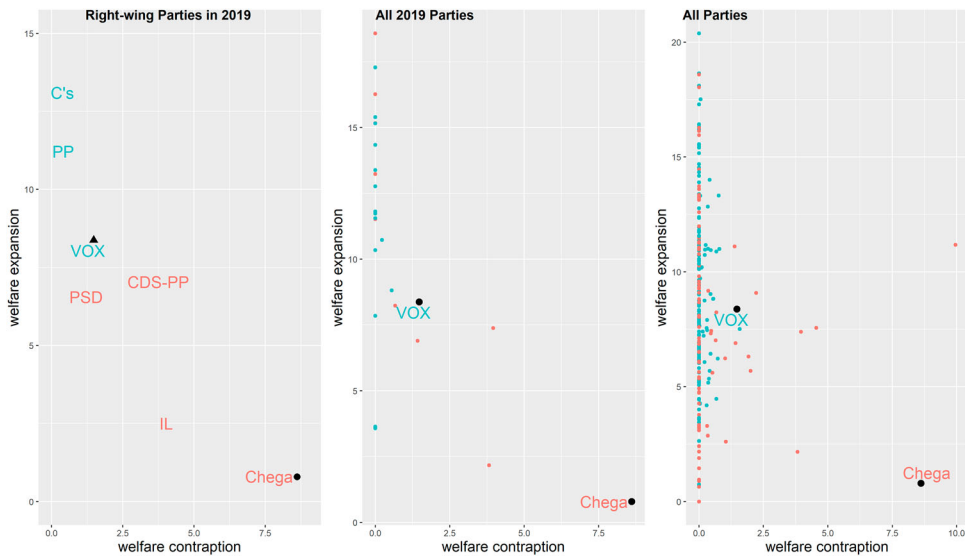


Figure 5. Salience of welfare expansion and contraction.

welfare cuts in post-Franco Spain, proposing welfare limitations is more common in Portugal. In this scenario, Chega stands out as the party that most fiercely opposes the expansion of welfare state. As mentioned above, Chega considers social welfare to be the undesirable result of the revolution's Marxist bias, and that welfare state provisions help undeserving people. Figure A7 in the Appendix shows the average attention to welfare limitation and expansion in Portugal over time, confirming how Chega's unique position on this issue.

The only party to propose more welfare cuts in post-1974 Portugal was the CDS-PP in 2011, during the most heated phases of the debate about austerity measures imposed by the Troika in exchange for €78 billion bail-out programme (Moury & Standing, 2017). It is interesting to note, however, that the 2011 CDS-PP manifesto also proposes to expand the welfare (in fact, welfare expansion occupies a slightly larger share of the manifesto compared to welfare limitations), while in Chega's 2019 manifesto this aspect is virtually absent. Crucially, the necessity to cut the welfare connects to the issue of freedom because the abolition of welfare state is considered a precondition to obtain a free society that cuts its ties with the illiberal, Marxist society built by the Carnation Revolution.

6. Conclusions

Long-term cleavages and contextual factors created an opportunity that VOX and Chega managed to seize by strategically positioning themselves within the existing political space. This confirms that no country is immune to the far right (Mudde, 2010), and that if there are still countries with unsuccessful PRR parties, this is less a demand issue than a supply one (Santana-Pereira & Cancela, 2021), as these countries have just not yet been confronted with the right party or political entrepreneur (Mudde, 2019).

VOX exploited the long-lasting centre-periphery cleavage to present itself at the 2019 elections as the only guardian of national unity. When the Catalan crisis reactivated nationalist sentiments, contributing to the formation of favourable opportunity structures for VOX, the party was able to recognize and exploit them by positioning itself at the extreme of the political space in terms of nationalism and centralization. Chega, on the other hand, managed to exploit the liberal-illiberal cleavage present in Portugal by linking it to the most pressing issues in the country: welfare provisions and public services. Chega combined a classic welfare chauvinistic approach (Abts et al., 2021) with a peculiar understanding of the Portuguese welfare state as the undemocratic and illiberal outcome of the 1974 Carnation revolution. The extreme salience of both personal freedom and welfare limitations in the party's manifesto confirm that Chega strategically chose to position itself in opposition to the democratic regime that resulted from the revolution.

We can therefore conclude that VOX and Chega exploited the existing cleavages to strategically position themselves and obtain an unexpected electoral breakthrough, but with a crucial difference. While VOX was helped by conjunctural factors such as the dramatic relevance attributed to the central-periphery cleavage and the Catalan issue, Chega seems to have (re)activated and politicized a dormant cleavage adopting a unique position on welfare provisions and the privatization of public services. The Iberian Peninsula can therefore offer two important lessons on how PRR parties strategically position themselves within the existing political space and cleavages to meet the existing demand. First, even if a demand for radical right policies exists it is necessary that a credible political entrepreneur strategically fills that space in order to activate it and produce an electoral breakthrough. Second, short-term opportunity structures can either be exploited, like VOX did with the Catalan issue, or manufactured, like Chega did with the provision of welfare and the privatization of health and education systems.

This study also presents several limitations that future research should address. First, the supply side should be examined together with the demand side, ideally collecting original survey data or realizing focus groups, to causally establish if the positions taken by Chega and VOX activated the PRR electorate. Second, the discourse of any political party evolves over time, and it is possible that the political offer developed by the Chega and VOX already changed since 2019. Third, we know that the media can play an influential role in normalizing the radical right (de Jonge, 2019), therefore taking this aspect into consideration could provide a more comprehensive view of the breakthrough of VOX and Chega. So far, the negative coverage of PRR parties in mainstream media seemed to explain their lack of electoral success (Lisi, 2015; Marchi, 2013), but things might be changing (M. Mendes & Dennison, 2021). Another gap that should be addressed in future research is the role of stigma: the levels of stigma generated by the authoritarian regimes might have faded, but it is important to measure the actual extent of this process at the individual and collective level. Finally, one might argue that the timing of these parties' electoral breakthrough could be linked to the parties' use of a populist rhetoric, or that different material beyond the party manifestos might produce different results.

Glancing at the possible consequences of this electoral breakthrough, it remains to be seen whether these two parties will remain relevant on the long run. For sure, the welfare state provisions in Portugal, and nationalist tendencies in Spain will constitute a battleground for right-wing parties and their ability to remain relevant. If the mainstream

right-wing parties will reposition themselves and steal the radical right's thunder, Chega and VOX might suffer a setback. However, once the process of normalization starts it can hardly be stopped because the parliamentary entry of PRR parties makes voters more confident in expressing support for the radical right (Valentim, 2021). If Chega and VOX will lose steam, they might be replaced by political actors with a similar agenda.

Notes

1. E.g. Finland, Sweden, and Germany (Arter, 2010; Arzheimer, 2019; Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2018).
2. The full list is available online in PDF format: <https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/01-thepopulist.pdf>
3. Additionally, VOX and Chega face strong stigmatization (Dinas & Northmore-Ball, 2020). However, it is beyond the scope of this article to establish whether the stigma still existed in 2019 or how VOX and Chega managed to overcome it.
4. VOX exists since 2013, and only managed to become a national political player after the Catalan crisis. Centralist attitudes were a crucial predictor of voting for VOX at the 2018 Andalusian elections, the party's first breakthrough (Ortiz Barquero, 2019).
5. Standard Eurobarometer 92: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2255>
6. Manifestos show how parties articulate their idea of society and the salience they attribute to several issues in an unmediated way (compared to, e.g. newspaper articles or interviews). Moreover, party manifestos are authoritative documents giving 'a clear overview of the ideas of a party at a certain point in time' (Rooduijn et al., 2014, p. 566).
7. Figure A1 in the Appendix shows that, in 2019, Chega and VOX have the manifestos with the highest salience of law-and-order issues.
8. Figure A2 in the Appendix shows the attention devoted to freedom by all 2019 manifestos in Spain and Portugal, using a sub-variable of 'freedom' available only for 2019. This sub-variable (per201_1) disentangles the attention to personal freedom (including individualism and freedom from the state) from human rights. Moreover, Figure A3 in the Appendix shows that in 2019 Chega was the party that most insisted on the necessity to change the constitution.
9. Figure A4 in the Appendix shows the unprecedented levels of positive mentions for nationalism at the 2019 elections, while A5 shows how VOX advocates for the restriction of the process of immigration more than every other party, including Chega. Finally, Figure A6 illustrates that while VOX and Chega stand out in terms of law-and-order proposals, VOX is not only more nationalist than Chega but also considers a priority the fight against multiculturalism.

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