

# VOX PARTY

**IMPACT:** The VOX Party is a far-right, nationalist political party in Spain that advocates discriminatory policies against Spanish Muslims and Muslim immigrants. VOX has achieved significant political success in regional and national elections since its 2013 founding, while building a political narrative that Spain must be “reconquered” from Muslims again—a reengineering of the centuries-old mythology of *Reconquista*. The party’s political messaging employs derogatory rhetoric against Muslims broadly and Muslim women in particular, while declaring a “civilizational clash” between Spain and Islam.

- The VOX Party was founded in Spain in December 2013. The party’s first chairman was Aleix (Alejo) Vidal-Quadras. After Vidal-Quadras left the party in 2015, two of its founders, Santiago Abascal, a former member of the conservative Partido Popular (PP), and Iván Espinosa de los Monteros, were elected as president and general secretary, respectively. **VOX is a far-right political party with two central issues: Spanish nationalism and traditional Catholic values concerning marriage, family, and abortion.** VOX describes itself as the party “of common sense, the one who gives voice to what millions of Spaniards think at home and the only one who fights the suffocating political correctness.” Its **political platform supports a united nation centered on the monarchy; the Spanish language; national symbols such as the flag, anthem, and cross; and the protection of what it describes as the “natural family”—a heteronormative, married couple with children.** As reported by *Reuters*, VOX has a history of “attacks...on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights” in Spain.
- VOX’s founders, former members of PP, became disillusioned by the policies of the Partido Popular leader and then-Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. Specifically, VOX’s founders disagreed with what they believed were weak stances on social issues, such as the Catalan independence movement, gender equality laws, the law on abortion, the historical memory law that acknowledges and guarantees rights to the victims of the Civil War and their descendants, and the progressive implementation of a more secular education in Spanish society.
- As noted by many scholars, Spain and Portugal had been notable exceptions in European politics for their absence of far-right parties until recently. Following the victory of the Nationalist faction in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), the country was ruled by dictator Francisco Franco for forty years until his death in 1975. Francoist Spain was built upon the principles of authoritarianism, Spanish nationalism, national Catholicism, monarchism, militarism paired with national conservatism, and an extreme aversion to communism, masonry, Catalanism and liberalism. Since Franco’s death, no other far-right party had been elected to the Spanish Parliament—with the brief exception of one seat gained in 1979 by the minoritarian party Fuerza Nueva (New Force).
- The **VOX Party was founded at the peak of Spain’s economic crisis and political instability.** The 2010s were marked by high rates of unemployment and youth unemployment (27 percent and 57 percent, respectively) and the Catalan independence movement. Catalan independence and separation from Spain had reached maximum support of 49 percent in this period. In 2014, the abdication of King Juan Carlos I took place in the same year as the emergence of the far-left political

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party Podemos (We Can). **The rise of Podemos and VOX marked a historical departure from decades of two-party rule between the leftist Partido Socialista (PSOE) and the conservative Partido Popular (PP).**

- **Among far-right movements in Europe, VOX is distinctive for having one of the most polarizing rhetoric and agendas.** According to a study of misinformation on Spanish social media networks by the British Institute for Strategic Dialogue, “a network of 2,882 tweeters suspected of being bots (fake users)” were identified as “spreading the message of Vox and Islamophobic content.” According to the researchers, the network “was originally used to attack the Venezuelan regime and after a period of silence it was reactivated in 2017” following the vehicle-ramming attack on Las Ramblas in Barcelona by Moroccan Spaniard Younes Abouyaaqoub that killed thirteen and injured over one hundred people. The researchers argued that activity resurfaced days ahead of the Spanish general election in April 2019. In late 2019, scholar Dr. Carmen Aguilera-Carnerero observed polarizing language on Spanish social media related to Podemos and VOX, primarily on two issues: “the Catalan independence process and the exhumation of the late dictator Francisco Franco’s corpse.”
- **VOX downplays its relationship with other far-right parties, but although scholars have argued that their rise is linked to “a unique Spanish reality,” their history and growth is associated with “the rise of the global far-right worldwide.”** For instance, **VOX has repeatedly used the slogan “Hacer España Grande Otra vez” on social media—a play on former US president Donald Trump’s slogan, “Make America Great Again.”** Abascal’s party has also praised many of the policies of the Trump administration. In March 2019, VOX parliamentarian and party leader Espinosa de los Monteros attended the US-based Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), which describes itself as “the largest and most influential gathering of conservatives in the world.” He shared on Facebook, “#CPAC is the conservative’s paradise, and a place where VOX has been received with open arms.”
- VOX’s electoral success as a far-right party in Spain has been unprecedented. **In the six years after its founding, the party gained seats in both the Spanish and European parliaments. Since 2017, VOX has received a large percentage of the conservative vote.** In December 2018, regional elections were held in Andalusia (al-Andalus in Arabic), the most populous Spanish region in the south, and a geographical bridge between Africa and Europe. While a socialist government had ruled the region for almost forty years, VOX won 11 percent of the vote in December 2018 and entered the Andalusian Parliament for the first time with twelve seats. Nearly a year later, **in November 2019, VOX ran for the general election and gained representation in the Spanish Parliament for the first time in its history with fifty-two seats, along with three seats in the European Parliament.** The conservative Partido Popular and Ciudadanos saw their support increasingly diminish.
- **VOX supports and promotes the anti-Muslim trope of a civilizational clash between the religion of Islam and “Western”—in this case Spanish—culture.** VOX and its members have often wielded this trope in nationalistic rhetoric during elections. The motto of **VOX’s national campaign for the 2019 general elections was “La Reconquista” (“The Reconquista”)**, a reference to the historical myth constructed in the nineteenth century of a “struggle of national liberation against invading Muslims, culminating in a final Christian victory in 1492,” the expulsion

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of Muslims from Spain after eight centuries of settlement in the Iberian Peninsula, and the expulsion of Jews.

- For the 2019 general elections, VOX symbolically launched its political campaign in Covadonga—a small town in the north and the historical starting point of the so-called Reconquista. The party ended its campaign in the south in Granada, the last Islamic stronghold, whose conquest by the Catholic kings signaled the end of Islamic rule in Spain and Europe. During the 2018 Andalusian election campaign, Abascal posted a [video](#) with the slogan “Andalucía por España” (“Andalusia for Spain”), in which he rode a horse across Andalusian fields to the Lord of Rings soundtrack.
- During the 2019 national general election campaign, **VOX [tweeted a photo of Abascal wearing a seemingly antique helmet while claiming that the Reconquista was going to begin—implying a symbolic link between Abascal and the Catholic conquest of Muslims in Andalusia.](#)** As [reported](#) in El Español, however, that type of helmet was not in use until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—long after the Catholic kings’ conquest of Granada. **VOX has also trivialized the severity of discrimination against Muslims in the country, arguing that [the actual problem is not Islamophobia but Islamophilia.](#)** In an August 2017 television interview, Abascal claimed that the fact “VOX doesn’t like the way ‘Muslims see the world’: the fact they do not separate religion from politics, the way they treat women, how they understand freedom” does not make the party anti-Muslim. As of 2019, the [Muslim population](#) in Spain was over 2 million, or 4 percent of the total population. There are approximately 1,700 [Islamic places of worship](#) in Spain, including mosques and small prayer rooms.
- The **party has frequently invoked other historical figures associated with historical violence against Muslims**, including Fernando González de Córdoba, also known as “El Gran Capitán,” and Don Pelayo, the political leader who initiated the Reconquista. During the electoral campaign prior to the 2018 Andalusian elections, [Abascal stated](#) he preferred the Andalusia of the [Catholic kings](#), King [Ferdinand III the Saint](#), [the Great Captain](#), and the [Courts of Cadiz](#) over [Blas Infante](#), [Almanzor](#) (the Muslim Statesman leader of the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba or al-Andalus). He also [promised](#) that under their leadership the Great Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba, currently a Catholic cathedral but formerly a mosque, would only be referred to as a cathedral. In a 2019 visit to the European Parliament, General Secretary of VOX Javier Ortega-Smith [discussed](#) the historical events of Christian-Muslim conflict, such as the Battles of Las Navas de Tolosa (thirteenth century) and Lepanto (sixteenth century), as well as historical figures such as sixteenth-century Emperor [Charles V](#), who continuously fought the Ottomans, and claimed, “Without Lepanto and Carlos V, the ladies in this room would wear burqas.”
- VOX’s **platform for the general elections in 2019 was titled “[100 medidas para la España Viva](#)” (100 points to keep Spain Alive).** The section “Defense, Security, and Frontiers” proposes the “closure of fundamentalist mosques”; the “expulsion of imams who propagate fundamentalism, contempt for women, or jihad”; and a “prohibition against erecting mosques promoted by Wahhabism, Salafism, or any fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.” It also proposes “excluding the teaching of Islam in public schools,” requiring Islamic teachers to assist the state in the “detection of radicals,” demanding “reciprocity in the opening of places of worship,” and the “rejection and outlawing of financing by third countries from places of worship”—the latter a violation of the right guaranteed by Spanish Law in the [Cooperation](#)

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Agreement signed in 1992. VOX proposed the construction of an “insurmountable” wall in the autonomous Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla, demanded that Morocco provide “full recognition and respect for Spanish sovereignty of Ceuta and Melilla,” and endorsed the “publication of data on nationality and origin in crime statistics.”

- **VOX leaders have a history of posting anti-Muslim and misogynist rhetoric and images on social media.** In December 2018, Abascal responded to a tweet by Najat Driouech, a Catalan Arab Muslim woman member of the separatist Catalan Party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC, Republican Left of Catalonia) who in the Catalan Parliament stated that VOX was a fascist, male chauvinist party. Abascal attempted to deflect and delegitimize Driouech, who wears a headscarf, replying that before calling them male chauvinists, she should look at her own “home.” On the day of the April 2019 general elections, the VOX Twitter account posted a photo of two voters—a Muslim-appearing woman wearing a niqab and another who appeared to be a white Spanish woman—in line to vote. **The tweet read “Submission vs. Freedom,” implying that the woman wearing a niqab represented “submission” while the woman without one represented “freedom.”**
- In late 2014 and early 2015, a contentious public exchange of op-eds in the newspaper Libertad Digital took place between Abascal and Natalia Andújar, the president of the Islamic Commission (Comisión Islámica) who is described by the Spanish Ministry of Justice as the “representative to the State for negotiating, adopting and subsequently implementing” the Cooperation Agreement—the 1992 Agreement signed between the Spanish state and the Islamic Commission that guarantees the rights of Muslims to practice Islam on Spanish land. **Andújar described Abascal as a “xenophobe and Islamophobe” in response to a piece written by Abascal titled “Trojan Horse” in which he warned of the dangers of teaching Islam in Spanish schools and claimed it would give “a dangerous privilege to Islam.”** In another instance, the Association of Muslims against Islamophobia (Musulmanes contra la islamofobia) brought a hate crime case against VOX member Javier Ortega-Smith. However, **in July 2019, the Supreme Court considered that the words of the general secretary of the party, who had stated that “our common enemy, our future enemy is the Islamist invasion,” were abominable but not a crime.**
- The **VOX Party has a long history of disparaging and inflammatory statements against immigrants, Muslims, and people from the Maghreb.** In late **January 2021, Twitter suspended VOX’s account, citing a violation of the social media platform’s hate speech policies.** According to reporting in El Mundo, the temporary suspension took effect just a few hours into the party’s election campaigning in Catalonia. **Twitter’s decision reportedly came after VOX’s tweets linked immigration to crime—language that Twitter has described as “incitement to hatred.”** The tweet in question stated, “They account for approximately 0.2% and are responsible for 93% of the complaints. Most are from the Maghreb. It is Catalonia that is leaving unanimous indolence and complicity with imported crime. Only Vox remains!” **After a one-week suspension, the VOX Twitter account reappeared.**

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