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### The use of paid media to disseminate political advertising by political parties in Spain: the case of VOX

### El uso de los medios pagados para difundir la publicidad política por los partidos políticos en España: el caso VOX

**Deadlines** | Received: 15/01/2023 - Reviewed: 30/05/2023 - Accepted: 25/07/2023 - Published: 01/01/2025

#### Abstract

This paper analyses VOX's use of paid media from its first campaign in April 2014 to the present (closing date 31 December 2021). The aim of this study to find out how the political party uses the different media, to quantify which media it uses and to analyse what messages it launches through its political advertising (propaganda). The competitive context is collected, i.e. the number of pieces and the media used by political parties and trade unions in the study period to establish a frame of reference. The 159 advertising pieces used by VOX in the period under analysis were viewed or listened exhaustively in order to subsequently code and classify their messages with the aim of discovering which issues are the most relevant for the organisation when it comes to advertising. That is to say, those that it wants to influence or transmit more clearly to the public. In addition, it has been established which people are the referents in the pieces. It was concluded that Vox uses the radio more intensively than its competitors, and that the party communicates mainly on issues related to immigration, taxes and the unity of Spain.

#### Keywords

Political communication; media; political parties; Populism; propaganda; VOX

#### Resumen

El trabajo analiza el uso que ha realizado VOX de los medios de comunicación de pago desde su primera campaña en abril de 2014 hasta la actualidad (con cierre a 31 de diciembre de 2021). El objetivo es conocer el uso que hace el partido político de los diferentes medios de comunicación, cuantificar qué medios utiliza y analizar qué mensajes lanza a través de su publicidad política (propaganda). Se recoge el contexto competitivo, es decir el número de piezas y los medios de comunicación que han utilizado los partidos políticos y sindicatos en el periodo de estudio para establecer un marco de referencia. Se han visionado o escuchado de forma exhaustiva las 159 piezas publicitarias que VOX ha utilizado en el periodo objeto de análisis para posteriormente codificar y clasificar sus mensajes con el objeto de descubrir que temas son los más relevantes para la organización a la hora de hacer publicidad. Es decir, aquellos sobre los que quiere incidir o transmitir con mayor claridad a la ciudadanía. Además, se ha constatado que personas son las referentes dentro de las piezas. Se concluye que Vox utiliza la radio de una forma más intensa que sus competidores, y que la formación comunica principalmente sobre temáticas relativas a la inmigración, a los impuestos y a la unidad de España.

#### Palabras clave

Comunicación política; medios de comunicación; partidos políticos; Populismo; propaganda; VOX.

## 1. Introduction

Organisations can communicate to the public through advertising, direct contact by their own means or on their social media accounts, or through references made to them in the mass media. The difference between these options is that when they create advertising or use their own channels of communication, organisations have total control over the message, which is not the case when their opinions or ideas are reported in the media, unless such media exposure is the product of a monetary exchange.

The media are often identified as one of the peripheral factors influencing the degree of public success of a political movement (Cammaerts, 2012) as they can increase the movement's visibility and help media users identify with it. Researchers in fields such as sociology and communication studies have analysed news production processes in depth, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, identifying the elements that stand out most in political discourse and analysing their impact on the public (Dijk, 1990; Tuchman, 1983). Indeed, media and politics have a symbiotic relationship because they are mutually dependent on one another (Enli, 2017), to the point that "the journalistic profession is tied to the political system due to the role of sources from the latter in the work of the former" (Cortiñas & Pont-Sorribes, 2006: 130).

On the other hand, according to Carlo Marletti's theory of thematisation (Marletti, 1984), the media act in collusion with the political establishment by focusing attention on certain specific themes. The "mediatisation" of politics finds its full expression in the wider process of the popularisation of political discourse (Mazzoleni & Sfondini, 2009). The themes chosen are also presented in sensationalist terms: "When a news story is presented as terrible or dangerous it becomes ambiguous and enigmatic. The risk effect and uncertainty with which the news is presented and edited feeds the public longing for revelations" (Gil Calvo, 2004: 153).

As Manuel Castells suggests, we are living in an age in which vertical communication coexists with horizontal communication among the masses, whose members create and distribute their own content (Castells, 2009). It is also a world where social media platforms form part of the public conversation, giving individuals a leading role in the creation of public opinion and making them feel that they are being heard, that their views matter, that they belong (Coleman, 2012). On the other hand, the public disengagement or disaffection with politics arising from discontent or disappointment with political parties has forced those parties to change their strategies in order to get their messages across to the people. According to Sánchez Barrilao, we have moved from the risk society to the fear society, where "social media platforms (but not them alone) channel fear and frustration into political life through lies in the form of post-truth, as well as through the psychological manipulation of the public" (Sánchez Barrilao, 2020: 109). It is in this context that populist parties are able to achieve their best results.

Affective and social polarisation is increasingly prominent and ubiquitous in the political discourse of many Western democracies (Suhay, Bello-Pardo & Maurer, 2018). According to Adriana Amado, "pop" politics is a style of political communication based on personalism and spectacle, which constructs celebrity-politicians (Amado, 2016) in "societies devoted more to the media than to politics," reflecting Andy Warhol's famous assertion that in the future everybody would get their fifteen seconds of fame. In recent years, a form of populism in keeping with the principles outlined above has become a key feature of the political scene, changing the traditional ecosystem of political parties in Europe (Bevelander & Wodak, 2019).

Mudde proposes a very specific definition of populism:

Populism, finally, is an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people. Populist radical rightist politicians claim to be "the voice of the people" and accuse the established parties of being in cahoots with each other (2016: 296).

Arias Maldonado describes four forms of populism. The first is what he describes as populism as a thin or weak ideology, as it offers no solutions to the problems afflicting society (Freedon, 1998) but is based simply on the opposition between the people and the elite. The second form is populism as a strategy to gain power by means of a charismatic leader, while the third is populism as discourse, i.e., as a form of political expression that is made visible in its formulation and that positions the people against the elite. The fourth and final form is populism as a political style, a form of communication used by politicians to address the public (Arias Maldonado, 2018). In this sense, "[i]f we agree that populism is primarily a style of politics, then there is little difficulty in noting that populism can be a feature of both left-wing and right-wing leaders and movements" (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013). Irrespective of their political orientation, populists present themselves as defenders of the people against the "Establishment" or the powers that

be. Populism is thus founded on "a charismatic leader, anti-intellectualism, the use of an emotional communicative register, identification with an idealised homeland, and a repertoire of action based on provocation, polarisation and protest" (Arias Maldonado, 2018: 154). As Block & Negrine point out, the populist style of communication has a number of very clear features:

the specific style of rhetoric used by the populists involves adversarial, emotional, patriotic, and abrasive speech through which they connect with the discontented often via grassroots, community-oriented, communicative practices and spaces. (Block & Negrine, 2017: 182)

Emotion is an especially important resource in the political discourse of populist parties. Populist discourse is founded on an intention to stir up emotions and on an approach aimed at conveying simple messages that the public can grasp quickly and identify with (Taggart, 2000). Emotions can affect cognitive content (memory), the cognition process (processing of information), motivation, and decision making (Forgas, 2001). In populist discourse, these emotions have a markedly negative quality, as "populism works with negative feelings" (Arias Maldonado, 2018, p. 156) and creates the impression of a context of crisis, breakdown, or menace (Taggart, 2000). Far-right movements in Europe, such as the VOX party in Spain, distance themselves from what is considered populism as ideology as in their case the aim is simply to use a populist rhetorical style. The connection between propaganda and power has been explored by numerous authors (Herrerros Arconada, 1989; Jowett & O'Donnell, 1986). Pineda posits a definition of propaganda that acknowledges this connection:

propaganda is a communicative phenomenon of content and ideological aims whereby a (collective or individual) Sender purposefully and deliberately transmits a message to achieve, maintain, or reinforce a position of power over the thought or behaviour of a (collective or individual) Receiver (Pineda Cachero, 2006: 228).

In Spain, the current rise of populism can be traced back to 11 March 2014, the date on which the political party Podemos (whose name literally means "We Can" in Spanish) was founded. Podemos emerged out of Spain's anti-austerity movement and took inspiration from Stéphane Hessel's *Time for Outrage!* (Hessel & Sampedro, 2011). Although the far-right party Vox had been founded earlier, at the end of 2013, its lack of impact on voters confined it to marginal status, given its initial image as a splinter group from the mainstream People's Party (PP). This changed after Catalonia's declaration of independence in October 2017 and the regional elections in Andalusia in December 2018, when a substantial shift in the traditional power balance in the region had a cataclysmic effect on the political status quo (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Populist discourse in Spain has been studied by Olivas Osuna with his analysis of Spain's different political parties (Olivas Osuna, 2021b). Pippa Norris at Harvard University had previously analysed different aspects of political parties, such as populist rhetoric and stances on different issues (Norris, 2020b), in a study launched in 2019 that collected responses from 1,861 experts in 163 countries, including Spain. Graph 1 presents the level of populist rhetoric of Spain's political parties according to Norris's study, which reveals that the level of populist rhetoric of VOX is much higher than that of other parties.

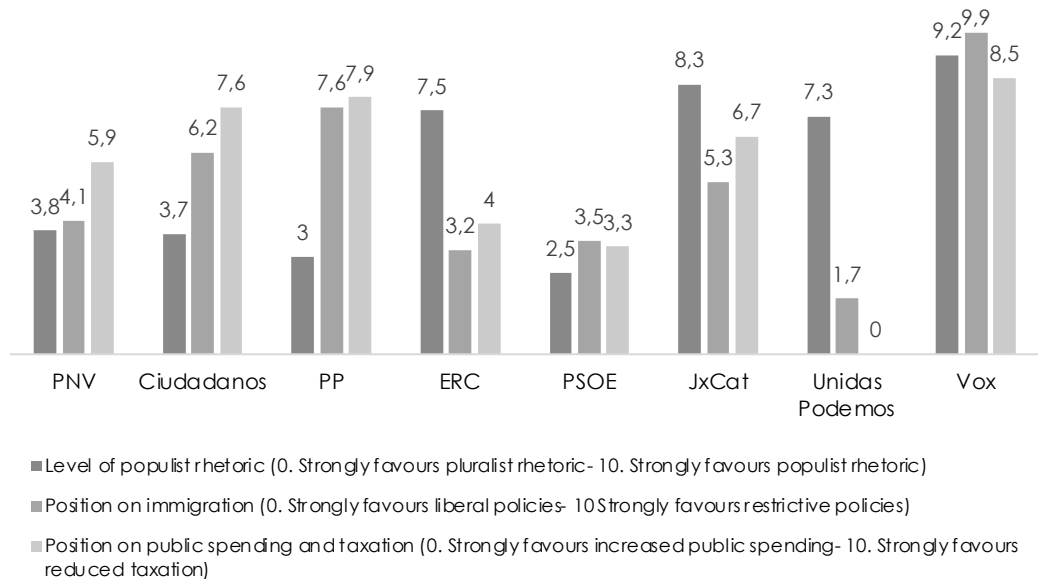
As Guerrero-Solé et al. point out (2020: 2),

the popularisation of social media has provided populist parties with easy, affordable access to voters, free from the mediation of any other intervening agent, on a human level, by personalising their message and targeting people with similar ideas.

This raises the question of the potential effect of social media on democracy (Arias Maldonado, 2016), as these new channels of communication allow organisations to sidestep traditional media (Engesser et al., 2017) and take advantage of the "disintermediation of communication" (Guerrero-Solé et al., 2020: 8). In Spain, where, according to data published by IAB <sup>[1]</sup>, there are nearly 27 million social media users (IAB Spain, 2021), the most widely used platforms are Instagram (60%) <sup>[2]</sup> and Twitter (42%). It is worth highlighting the fact that Twitter has become the most popular social media platform around the world for sharing information and opinions on politics and political issues (Manfredi-Sánchez, Amado-Suárez & Waisbord, 2021). This has not gone unnoticed by political parties, especially those described as having a populist discourse. VOX has the largest number of followers on Instagram of any political party in Spain, with around 634,000, while Podemos (Unidas Podemos) has 1.5 million followers on Twitter. There is already extensive research on VOX's use of social media (Aladro Vico & Requeijo Rey, 2020; Bernardes-Rodal, Rey & Franco, 2022; Castro Martínez & Díaz Morilla, 2021; Lava Santos, 2021; Pineda, Fernández & Rebollo-Bueno, 2021)

At the same time, political parties of all stripes, from the most "traditional" to the most "recent", use established mass media platforms such as television (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) or print media (Rooduijn, 2014), and they also spend part of their budgets on advertising. In fact, some authors attribute the rise of populism to the mass media (Kornhauser, 1959).

**Graph 1 Levels of populist rhetoric [3] and positions on immigration [4] and public spending/taxation [5] of Spanish political parties. Global Party Survey 2019.**



Source: (Norris, 2020a)

The objective of this research is to identify and analyse the communication strategy (media mix) used by VOX throughout the period from its first mass media campaign in April 2014 to its last advertisements in December 2021. More specifically, it aims to identify the media VOX used and whether they were different from those used by its competitors, as well as whether the media used changed during this period.

In addition, the database of advertisements has been used to analyse the populist discourse engaged in by the party in its paid messages and the evolution of those messages over time, determining the relative importance of the themes of public spending/taxation, regional autonomy, patriotism, crime/security, and immigration.

## 2. Methodology

The focus of this study is on VOX's advertising and a quantitative analysis of its content (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002). Specifically, the research involved the evaluation of certain phenomena in the context of the data available. Moreover, although it does not go as far as developing a system for measuring populist discourse like the one proposed by Kirk Hawkins (Hawkins, 2009), it does quantify both the number of new advertisements used in VOX's campaigns and the content of those advertisements. To this end, it uses a coding system based on the issues addressed in the communications.

The first step of the research was the coding and analysis of newly released advertisements by political parties and trade unions active in Spain in order to contextualise the type of media used by the different "brands". In other words, the study only takes into account the creative or advertisement itself, not how often it has been used or the associated media investment. The aim of this first step was to determine which media platforms (television, radio, print, etc.) were used by the different political parties in their advertising strategies and whether there were any changes over the course of the period from 2014 to 31 December 2021. This would reveal whether the strategies of the political parties differed in terms of their media mix. The second step was to analyse the advertising used by VOX, identifying the main issues addressed and the individuals featured in its advertisements.

For the purpose of this research, newly released advertisements (appearing in the media for the first time) were collected from the Mosaico database compiled by Infoadex [6]. This database contains new creatives (first recorded appearance of a specific creative) appearing in different types of media: television, radio, daily newspapers, Sunday editions, magazines, outdoor advertising, cinemas, online, or social media. The period analysed was selected in view of VOX's media investment. The year 2014 was taken as a starting point because it was when VOX launched its first advertising campaign. The data were extracted from Infoadex's Mosaico HD platform and analysed in Excel.

The data collected from this source amounted to a total of 5,669 creatives (advertisements appearing for the first time) released by political parties and trade unions in the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2021. From this initial universe, we selected only those advertisements paid for by the Spanish political parties with the largest numbers of seats in the national parliament: PSOE, PP, VOX, UP and CS. These five parties accounted for a total of 2,989 advertising pieces, 157 of which (5.25%) belonged to VOX. The parameters analysed for all the political parties for purposes of comparison were medium, format, date of release, year, political party, slogan and region. In the case of VOX, the issues addressed in their advertisements have also been analysed, as well as the presence of their leaders in the ads.

VOX's advertising was analysed by means of exhaustive viewing of the pieces (ads), studying and classifying their content by coding the issues addressed. For the choice of issues, previous studies that classified each publication based on the dominant presence of indicators were considered, with the aim of establishing a profile that could support the development of some hypotheses related to populist leadership (a, b, c) and populist communication (d, e, f). The non-exclusive categories used were: a) polarisation: references to adversaries, enemies, or factions that the party opposes or distinguishes itself from; b) conspiracy: suspicions, threats; c) exaltation: patriotism, ideologising, appeals to the people; d) personalisation: private life, personal achievements; e) emotion: expression of feelings, emojis; f) media publicity and coverage. These categories are characteristic of populism and have been used in previous research (Waisbord & Amado, 2017). Olivas Osuna defines the different dimensions into which populism can be broken down: antagonism, morality, an idealised construction of society, the exaltation of popular sovereignty, and personalist leadership (Olivas Osuna, 2021a). With these contributions and in view of the results obtained, the issues addressed by VOX have been grouped into 11 thematic categories: campaign launches; public spending or taxation; Spain's autonomous regions; patriotism; crime or insecurity in Spanish cities; antagonism in general or challenging the status quo; immigration; corruption; exaltation of popular sovereignty; miscellaneous topics; and morality. All these themes are discussed in the following section.

### 3. Results

Newspapers continue to play a dominant role in political communication in Spain. The internet remains in second place, despite its high level of penetration in the country (84.1% of Spaniards connect to the internet daily, according to data from the AIMC's General Media Study), along with television, which becomes an essential media source during election campaign years. A comparison of advertising activity in different years (Table 1) reveals significant differences in the number of creatives used by political parties and trade unions. Important major elections, such as those held in 2015 and 2019, resulted in a substantial increase in advertising activity on the part of political organisations, with political parties and trade unions producing much larger numbers of advertising pieces (1,652 in 2015 and 1,373 in 2019). The press (newspapers) is the medium preferred by this sector, representing 46% of the total, followed by digital media (21%) and television (21%), especially local TV networks. Radio is used considerably less often by political organisations to get their messages across to the public, accounting for only 11% of the total number of new creatives.

If we exclude trade unions and minor parties from the analysis and look only at the data on the five Spanish political parties that received the most votes in the last general elections (PSOE, PP, VOX, UP, and CS), the universe is reduced from 5,669 to 2,989 advertisements. The ranking of media types remains the same, except that television is notably less important, although in election years, due to the allocation by TV networks of free advertising space to political parties, the number of new creatives on television increases dramatically.

**Table 1. Pieces (new creatives) broken down by media type used by political parties and trade unions (from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2021)**

	Total, parties and unions								Total
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Newspapers	200	664	206	128	222	637	237	297	2591 (46%)
Internet	142	411	132	57	65	207	35	168	1217 (21%)
Television	94	374	116	30	23	372	63	93	1186 (21%)
Radio	95	173	51	37	7	129	10	88	590 (11%)
Outdoor	8	25	2		3	28	3	11	80 (1%)

<b>Total, parties and unions</b>									
	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Total</b>
Magazines		3							3 (0%)
Cinemas		2							2 (0%)
Total	539	1.652	507	252	320	1.373	348	657	5.669

Pieces (new creatives) broken down by media type used by political parties with the most seats in Spanish parliament: PSOE, PP, VOX, UP and CS

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Total</b>
Newspapers	101	420	112	39	61	387	99	120	1339 (45%)
Internet	90	304	98	34	11	140	18	75	770 (26%)
Television	14	144	57	8	10	149	22	24	431 (14%)
Radio	42	122	47	18	6	92	3	57	387 (13%)
Outdoor	6	14			3	23	3	9	58 (2%)
Magazines		3							3 (0%)
Cinemas		1							1 (0%)
Total	253	1.008	314	99	91	791	145	285	2.989

Source: Prepared by authors.

Over the course of the years analysed, the conservative People's Party (PP) used the largest number of new creatives (Table 2). Of the total number of new creatives used by the parties analysed, 41% were by the PP, while the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) placed a distant second with 29%, followed by Ciudadanos with 15%, Podemos with 10%, and VOX with 5%. The ranking is the same in every year analysed except for 2017, the year of the regional elections in Catalonia, when the party Ciudadanos used the largest number of different advertising pieces. In those elections, Ciudadanos won both the most votes and the most seats in the Catalan parliament. 2015 was the year when the most creatives were used overall, topping 1,000 in total. In other words, the political discourse and the ways of communicating it were more diverse in 2015 than in the rest of the period analysed.

**Table 2. Pieces (new creatives) by political parties with the most seats in Spanish parliament (from January 2014 to 31 December 2021)**

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Total</b>
PP	131	517	114	32	33	272	53	81	1233 (41%)
PSOE	72	330	89	17	21	212	40	82	864 (29%)
CIUDADANOS	9	77	36	43	28	167	34	55	450 (15%)
PODEMOS	7	65	64	7	3	107	8	24	285 (10%)
VOX	34	19	11	0	6	33	10	43	157 (5%)
Total	253	1008	314	99	91	791	145	285	2989

Source: Prepared by authors.

As shown in Table 3, the People's Party (PP) had the largest number of creatives in most types of media, although in the case of television it was outdone by the PSOE, which broadcast a total of 32% of the total number of new creatives on TV, compared to 26% by the PP. The PSOE also outdid the PP on radio, as it was responsible for 40% of new creatives compared to 31% by the People's Party. VOX is

also notable for its use of radio, on which it broadcast 31% of its creatives, and on the internet, which accounted for 28% of its total.

**Table 3. Pieces (new creatives) used on different types of media by political parties with the most seats in Spanish parliament (from January 2014 to 31 December 2021)**

	Newspapers	Internet	Television	Radio	Outdoor	Magazines	Cinemas	Total
PP	699	272	112	120	28	1	1	1233 (41%)
PSOE	322	238	137	156	10	1	0	864 (29%)
CIUDADANOS	199	145	47	45	13	1	0	450 (15%)
PODEMOS	96	71	96	18	4		0	285 (10%)
VOX	23	44	39	48	3		0	157 (5%)
Total	1339	770	431	387	58	3	1	2989

Source: Prepared by authors.

VOX's first campaign appeared in digital media in April 2014. The three main pieces used are shown in Figure 1, marked with a "1". The campaign strategy used the party's provisional leader at the time, Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca, as its central focus. This campaign foreshadowed what would become two of the key issues on the party's political agenda: taxation and regional autonomy.

Although populist parties generally have a markedly personalist nature, in only 30% of the advertising pieces broadcast by VOX does the party's leader appear, either on his own or accompanied by another party member. In this respect, Alejo Vidal-Quadras had a much more prominent presence in the party's advertising than would his successor, Santiago Abascal.

To analyse the issues addressed by the party in its advertising, the 157 creatives used by VOX have been classified into the 11 thematic categories mentioned in the previous section. Some of these creatives feature ideas that have been placed in multiple categories, as a single creative may address more than one issue (Table 4).

**Table 4. Issues addressed by VOX <sup>[7]</sup> in their advertisements (from January 2014 to 31 December 2021)**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Campaign launch	7	2			4	17	6	19	55
Public spending/taxation	15	13	2		2	8	1	7	48
Regional autonomy	12	2	1		2	16	3	8	44
Patriotism	1		18		2	4		15	40
Crime/Security						2		30	32
Antagonism toward the status quo	11	6	4			5	3		29
Immigration			1		2	3	1	18	25
Corruption	12	3	2		1	3			21
Exaltation of popular sovereignty					2	5	1	9	17
Miscellaneous, other		4			2	3	1		10
Morality		1				1			2
Total	58	31	28	0	17	67	16	106	323

Advertising pieces used by VOX over the course of this period invite the public to attend campaign launches or political meetings, or appeal to them directly to vote for the party (17%). Notable among the party's preferred issues are public spending and taxation, addressed in 15% of its creatives; a few examples are shown in Figure 1. Spain's autonomous regional governments appear in 14% of VOX's advertisements, in a discourse that associates them with unnecessary spending, corruption, and a threat to the country's national unity.

**Figure 1. Examples of pieces addressing the issues of public spending, regional autonomy, crime/security, patriotism, antagonism toward the status quo, and corruption**



Source: Prepared by authors based on Infoadex creatives

Patriotism, which is represented in Figure 1 in the phrase "*Hacer España grande otra vez*" ("Make Spain Great Again"), is also vitally important in VOX's advertising. This mythical construction of the nation (Mudde, 2004) is identifiable in 12% of the creatives analysed. Crime and security are also recurring themes, as reflected in the slogan "*Protege Madrid, Vota Seguro*" ("Protect Madrid, Vote Safe") shown in Figure 1, used in the party's campaign in the Madrid region's last elections. Anti-immigration rhetoric is also common (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018), identified in 9% of advertising pieces and often linked to insecurity. Immigrants constitute the party's main adversary, with calls for more restrictive immigration legislation (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). The theme of challenging the status quo is worthy of separate mention, as the depiction of a confrontation between the people and the elite is one of the most common features of populism (Laclau, 2005). VOX has used this theme to challenge the traditional right-wing party (PP), with advertisements like those shown in Figure 1 that address PP voters or make indirect reference to the party's corruption scandals (the phrase "*Sobran los sobres*" refers to unlawful payments made to PP members). VOX's advertising on this point decreased over the period studied, with 9% of its pieces overall expressing a rejection of the political establishment (Fraser, 2016). Corruption, in general or linked to anti-PP discourse, has also been an important theme. In short, the "major" issues addressed in VOX's advertising during the period studied reflect the factors identified by Rooduijn (Rooduijn, 2014) as common elements of populist discourse: the people and popular sovereignty, challenging the status quo, patriotism and the idea of a crisis that in VOX's case focuses on regional autonomy as destabilising for the idea of Spain, and corruption. The results obtained from this analysis of the creatives used by VOX confirm the findings of Norris (Norris, 2020b) and the Global Party Survey (Norris, 2020a) with respect to VOX's stance on immigration, clearly favouring restrictive policies (Graph 1), and on public spending, favouring reduced taxation (Graph 1).

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

Voter segmentation strategies (Hersh, 2015) have evolved in recent years towards political microtargeting with its capacity to communicate individually tailored messages. Theoretically, these strategies enhance



the efficiency and effectiveness of campaign efforts (Barocas, 2012). In a world where the role of digital media extends beyond that of traditional media, "[t]he Internet is not a one-to-many mass medium like broadcasting, but can be many-to-many, one-to-many, and many-to-one, where Internet users are also producers of content" (Dutton et al., 2017). In a post-modern cultural context in which the legitimacy of established truths is constantly being questioned and where post-truth politics<sup>1</sup> has given rise to situations like that of the US presidential elections of 2016, when a fifth of social media posts discussing the elections came from accounts labelled as bots (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016), this reality in the digital environment coexists with the presence of political parties in the traditional mass media and the use they make of such outlets to publicise themselves.

The analysis of VOX's advertising reveals that the media mix used by the party in its campaigns is different from that of its competitors, as it assigns a key role to radio. This medium has a markedly male profile of listeners, with a penetration in the Spanish male population of 57.8% (AIMC, 2021) compared to 52.1% among women, a breakdown that fits well with the profile of VOX voters (Turnbull-Dugarte, Rama & Santana, 2020).

The issues addressed in VOX's advertising are typical of right-wing populist discourse: the people in a central role, criticism of the status quo, antagonism, anti-taxation, etc. These are messages aimed at maintaining the position of certain economic and social interests (Pineda Cachero, 2006). The analysis of VOX's creatives reveals that the advertising campaigns and strategies adopted by the party have resulted in a significant portion of the electorate identifying with its ideas, as reflected in the surveys by the Spanish Sociological Research Centre (CIS) on the political parties whose ideas Spanish citizens align with most. According to the most recent combination of CIS barometer records (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), 2021) with the current CIS barometer, 6.3% of the Spanish population identify VOX as the party that aligns most with their ideas, compared to 23.2% for the PSOE, 15.5% for the PP, 7.1% for Ciudadanos, and 3.5% for Unidas Podemos.

This study confirms the usefulness of analysing VOX's advertising for the purpose of studying its media mix, its discourse, and the recurring themes in its publicity on paid media. It also confirms the need to complement these findings with further research on the use of advertising by Spain's other political parties.

## 5. Specific contribution of each author

Contributions	Authors
Study conception and design	Author 1, Author 2
Documentary research	Author 1, Author 2
Data collection	Author 1
Data analysis and critical interpretation	Author 1, Author 2
Review and approval of versions	Author 1, Author 2

## 6. Acknowledgements

Translator: Martin Boyd.

## 7. References

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<sup>1</sup> "Post-truth" is defined here as a deliberate distortion of reality, manipulating beliefs and emotions with the aim of influencing public opinion and social attitudes. Demagogic leaders are masters of post-truth.

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## Notes

1. IAB is the world's biggest association of communications, advertising and digital marketing agencies, with a presence in 47 countries. It has been active in Spain since 2001.
2. Refers to users who have accessed the platform in the last month (IAB Spain, 2021)
3. The scale used to classify the information was: (0. Strongly favours pluralist rhetoric- 10. Strongly favours populist rhetoric). The original question was: V8 POPULIST RHETORIC. Parties can also be classified by their current use of POPULIST OR PLURALIST rhetoric. POPULIST language typically challenges the legitimacy of established political institutions and emphasizes that the will of the people should prevail. By contrast, PLURALIST rhetoric rejects these ideas, believing that elected leaders should govern, constrained by minority rights, bargaining and compromise, as well as checks and balances on executive power. Where would you place each party on the following scale (0. Strongly favors pluralist rhetoric, 10. Strongly favors populist rhetoric)?
4. The scale used to classify the information was: (0. Strongly favours liberal immigration policies- 10. Strongly favours restrictive immigration policies). The original question was: V10 IMMIGRATION. Q4.1 Turning now to party positions on specific political issues, where do parties currently stand on IMMIGRATION? Where would you place each party on the following scale: (0. Strongly favors liberal immigration policies 10. Strongly favors restrictive immigration policies)?
5. The scale used to classify the information was: (0. Strongly favours increased public spending- 10. Strongly favours reduced taxation). The original question was: V11 SPENDING V. TAX. Q4.2 Next, where do parties currently stand on PUBLIC SPENDING versus TAXATION? Where would you place each party on the following scale: (0 Strongly favors increased public spending- 10 Strongly favors reduced taxation)?
6. Infodex is a benchmark company in exhaustive monitoring of advertising in Spain, at both the quantitative level (investment, inserts, and placement) and the qualitative level (creatives). The methodology used by Infodex is detailed in their technical manual. <https://bit.ly/2WlcUzO>
7. In 2017, VOX did not use any new advertising pieces. Any media activity it engaged in involved the reuse of creatives from previous years.



