"Make Spain Great Again"

The Rise of Far-Right Populism in España

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In the 1980s, Western Europe's political climate was changed forever with the development of the populist radical right (PRR), a party family that was new to the region (Alonso et al., 2014). In the twenty-first century, far-right populism is observed to be one of the most tumultuous challenges that Western European democracy faces. In recent years, right-wing populist parties have rallied against a variety of topics, such as multiculturalism, immigration, welfare (Muddle, 2007). In past years, it is undeniable that Europe has seen many changes in regards to their way of life. These social, cultural, identity and economic reforms have created an environment in which new populist movements have found the room (and support) to form. The rise of right-wing populism in Europe can be attributed to a climate of a generalized crisis of prosperity, identity, government, and sense of security (Zarzalejos, 2016). The intensity to which countries suffer from these problems varies; however, the foundational issues can be found in many cases.

In these cases, far-right populists can find traction due to a section of the population perceiving an overall sense of insecurity and that their national identity is under attack by the massive influx of migrants and refugees, or by the impact of globalization (Zarzalejos, 2016). In the course of research into this area of academia, there has been small study into Spain, a country that was long seen as immune to far-right populism. For many years Spain has felt the impact of a significant presence of dissatisfaction towards government and increasingly anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic rhetoric. This sentiment is similar to many other Western European countries, where PRR parties have gained power. Far-right populism gained a foothold of power within regional

parliament in Andalusia during the elections in December 2018, and 10 percent of the votes in the general parliamentary election in April of 2019. During the election, the Vox party won twelve seats, a significant upset for the socialist party that had ruled for decades (and remains the majority). Until this time, Spain was not home to far-right power such as the Alternative für Deutschland (Germany), Front National (France), or Lega (Italy). The election was a victory for far-right populists both inside and outside of Spain and was viewed as a win for right-wing populists throughout Europe. The Vox, the far-right populist party in Spain, attributes their rise to a few factors, such regional nationalism stemming from decades of in-fighting for local autonomy in Catalonia and the Basque Country, an influx of migrants and refugees, and lastly, feminism. How did Spain finally succumb to far-right populism? What factors, both internal and external, brought forth a substantial victory for The Vox? In this literature review, these factors, but specifically peripheral nationalism as a basis for far-right populism in Spain, will be discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand how far-right populism came to be in Spain, it is first essential to understand what populism is and how it affects democracy. Populism at its base is not tied to any particular party affiliation. It is not exclusive to the far-right, far-left, or anyone in-between. Muddle (2007) defines populism as "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups." Further, these groups are divided into different classes: 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite' (Muddle, 2007). The creation of these two groups creates division within society (Wodak et al., 2013). This division is argued to be created by the 'corrupt elite,' who have betrayed the trust of the everyday people

(Canovan, 1999). Populism further contends that all politics should be "an expression of the general will of the people" (Muddle, 2007). Populism is set on the idea of how society ought to be, rather than how it is. How does far-right populism differ from necessary populism? In many cases, it follows similar rhetoric, calling out elites and the political establishment. This rhetoric has been used to highlight growing indignation from those who feel unheard by their government, especially in terms of migration, economics, and traditional values. According to Jen Rydgren (2005), far-right parties assert their populist rhetoric in a specific way, as to be more electorally successful than those who align themselves with out-right anti-democratic principles. They tend to be more anti-elite versus being anti-democratic (Rydren, 2005). Despite the rise of far-right populist parties throughout Europe, there have been tensions on how to label them (Alonso et al., 2014). Muddle (2007) created the concept of 'populist radical right parties' (PRR). This differs from other definitional phrases in many ways, as it emphasizes the notion that right-wing populist groups are not single-issue parties (Alonso et al., 2014). Alonso et al.,(2014) stated, "The electoral appeal of PRR parties is related not only to one driving idea (e.g., anti-immigration) but rather to a set of different ideas (e.g., ethnopluralism, populism, welfare chauvinism, etc.)"

Within Muddle's approach to PRR parties, there is also an emphasis that they differ in many ways from more traditional far-right parties (Alonso et al., 2014). Their rhetoric, in many ways, is at odds with many central tenets of liberal democracy. Despite this, they remain more democratic than many older far-right parties, who have traditionally supported more deep-seated authoritarianism tendencies (Alonso et al., 2014). Alonso et al. (2014) also point out that the conceptual approach that Muddle employs a foundation that states PRR parties have several

commonalities in regards to core ideology. These traits are described as authoritarianism, nativism, and populism (Alonso et al., 2014). The first trait, authoritarianism, is expressed through a partiality towards 'law and order' issues (Muddle, 2007). Second, the tendency towards nativism is seen through a mix of nationalism and xenophobia (Muddle, 2007). This is seen through the preference towards a monoculture and nation-state, and the attitude that perceives non-natives (or those perceived to be non-native) as threatening. According to Muddle (2007), all three of these characteristics are necessary to classify a particular party as a member of the PRR family.

With this research framework in mind, it becomes easier to understand and view the rise of The Vox, Spain's now mainstream PRR party. In further investigating the rise of far-right populism in Spain, it is also important to look at the social, and political conditions that created the environment for far-right populism to grow. This involves an understanding of cultural tensions, influxes of migrants and refugees, as well as the struggle for regional autonomy throughout areas of Spain. As stated previously, the Vox attributes their rise to a few factors, such regional nationalism stemming from decades of in-fighting for local autonomy in Catalonia, an influx of migrants and refugees, and the abandoning of traditional values. The gaining of twelve seats in Andalusia's regional parliament may seem inconsequential. However, it has major significance to many far-right populists both inside and outside of Spain.
Tensions have been brewing within Spain and the region of Andalusia for quite some time. One of the main catalysts for far-right tensions was that of the Catalan separatist movement. In October of 2017, the people of Catalonia voted in a referendum in which posed the questions, "Do you want to be an independent country in the form of a Republic?" (Cetra et al., 2018). This

move was primarily seen as unconstitutional and illegitimate by the Spanish government (Cetra et al., 2018). The Spanish government was not the only group that had objections to the independence referendum. The Vox party perceived this as a rejection of the Spanish identity, an act of peripheral nationalism that was counterproductive to the Spanish way of life (Maestre, 2019). The denial of a shared national identity plays a role in the Vox's rise to power, as identity is a fundamental tenet within the party (Maestre, 2019). What is peripheral nationalism, however? How does it impact the perception of a united Spanish identity? According to Seiler (1989), Peripheral nationalism refers to the protection of a cultural nation (i.e., Catalonia, the Basque region). It is a form of nationalism that exists on the outlines of state nationalism and runs contrary to a shared state identity (Seiler, 1989).

The Catalan referendum was not the first time that peripheral nationalism has been seen in Spain. For years, the Catalans have tried to emancipate themselves from Spain, and before that, the Basque region went through several decades of fighting for autonomy. This struggle for independence is essential to understand, as it provides a better context for the battle of central Spanish identity. Spain has been fragmented in many autonomous regions, which has emphasized the lack of a Spanish national Identity (Spencer & Croucher, 2008). During the time of oppressive dictator Francisco Franco, many peripheral identities in Spain were repressed, including those of the Basque (Urla, 1993). Aguilar and Humblebaek (2002) concluded that "For any Spaniard who had lived under the dictatorship, expressions such as "Spain" and the "Spanish Nation" or cheers of "Viva España" immediately evoked Francoist discourse." During the rule of Francisco, many other minority-language groups, including the Basques, were not permitted to speak, have media outlets in, or teach in schools in their tongue (Spencer & Croucher, 2008).

Following the collapse of the Franco dictatorship, there was a reaction towards peripheral nationalism and reclamation of the culture and language that many regions had long been deprived of. This ultimately led to the rising of Basque and Catalan nationalist groups, and struggles and referendums for independence, which have been viewed as largely "anti-Spain" by far-right ideologists. As Muro and Quiroga (2005) point out, "Spanish nationalists unified as a counter-force to these regional sources of identity."

Further, to better understand the rise of The Vox and their far-right sentiment, it is essential to look at other factors, such as the significant changes and impacts that migration and refugee influxes have had on the country in recent years. According to the United Nations International Organization for Migration, in September of 2018, Spain had already received 35,000 migrants via border crossing on land or sea. Additionally, according to statistics from 2018, Spain saw 42 percent of all new arrivals and received migrants via sea crossing at twice the rate of Greece, and six times the rate of Italy (IOM, 2018). The shorter sea crossing from Northern Africa to Spain is seen to be the main reason for this more substantial influx in migration. It is welcomed by many; however, the Vox (as well as other far-right parties in Europe) see this migration trend as a negative. Schain (2018) asserts that "migration crisis, and the chaos they engender, can bolster support for populist radical right-wing and anti-immigration platforms." According to Ratkovic (2017), in 2014 research conducted by the Pew Research Center demonstrated that the majority of those who align themselves politically with right-wing parties wanted to limit the number of new immigrants that were allowed to enter their countries. This is a trend and tendency that is occurring in right-wing parties across Europe, due to their ultra-nationalistic attitudes.

Ratkovic (2017) also states that from the view of parties like the Vox, "migration, integration, and globalization all have negative consequences for Western European society." Many of these parties prescribe to ethnocentric nationalism and believe that the influx of migrants will lead to the washing away of their culture and ethnicity. Within the Vox, the fear is not only of migrants but also of Muslim migrants and refugees. This Anti-Muslim fear and sentiment are stoked through stereotypes and perceptions that Muslims are less likely to assimilate, or more likely to engage in a deviant or dangerous activity (Hamid, 2018). Additionally, Hamid (2018) asserts that the influx of refugees and migrants from Muslim countries, as well as the growing amount of Islamic symbolism in public life, have been met with strong resistance in certain areas, and are perceived to be yet another attempt to thwart a central national identity and assimilation.

CONCLUSION

Far-right populism has become a reality for many parts of Europe, and now Spain. Every country can become an environment for right-wing populism, and none are immune. The emergence of the Vox party in Spain is essential to analyze, as it provides better insight into how different forms of nationalism and immigration can play a role in the development of far-right attitudes and parties. The social and political structures within Spain have provided a space in which the Vox has found and gained ground, both regionally and nationally. The rise of a far-right party in Spain has encouraged other PRR members both inside and outside of Spain. On a global scale, it has emboldened nationalists, anti-immigrant, and anti-muslim sentiment. The continued popularity of these parties raises concerns and questions to the longevity and survival of Western European liberal democracy. It is a topic and issue that will need to be continually studied and researched to fully understand the impact and ramifications it will have on one of the

most prosperous regions of the world. Will democracy continue to survive in Europe? Will the long-standing socialists' party in Spain continued to rule, or will the Vox party continue to rise and gain power? Only time will tell.

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