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The Influence of Terrorist Attacks on the Eurosceptic Agenda of Right Wing Parties: Spanish *Vox* and French *Rassemblement National* as Case Studies

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Acknowledgements

Alla signora Maria e al nonno Adriano.

*"Il futuro è in mano ai deboli che si sono fatti coraggio.
E io me lo sono fatto, ma per farsi coraggio
Bisogna sapersi guardare dentro.
L'autocritica pretende consapevolezza.
Auguro a tutti voi
Che la vostra umiltà non si trasformi in insicurezza
E che la vostra sicurezza non si trasformi in arroganza"*

(Mario Molinari, in arte Tedua, in "Malamente")

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I: Introduction

The new millennium has seen the emergence and the development of new events and occurrences that have altered the way in which people interpret the world and that have led to adjustments in the political sphere. One of the most crucial affairs in such a realm has been the finalization of terrorist attacks, carried out especially by Islamic extremist organizations, in Western countries, such as the offensives carried out in the United States on 9/11, or the events in France in 2015 or in Spain in 2016. In particular, Europe has been the target of such aggressions in the late 2010s, with 17 attacks in 2015, 33 in 2017, and 24 in 2018 (European Council), which were executed in cities such as Paris, Nice, Barcelona, and Berlin. The attacks had an extensive impact on the population of the European Union and on political parties, especially those of the European member-states hit by terrorists, which have often held the Union accountable, giving rise to a Eurosceptic feeling among the population.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the manifestos and political values of the right parties of *Vox*, based in Spain, and of the *Rassemblement National*, which changed its name from *Front National* and operating in France, and how, and if, the terrorist attacks suffered by the States have influenced their attitudes towards the European Union and its policies.

As far as France is concerned, an analysis of Parliamentary speeches between 2010-2022 will be carried out using *Python* and *R Studio*, in order to identify the topics with which the Parliament was most concerned about during the time frame. Unfortunately, it was not possible to replicate the same study for Spain due to the lack of availability of relevant dataframes, the reason why it was also difficult to conclude the impact on Spanish policies.

A. Methodology Used for Text Analysis

In order to perform the text analysis of Parliamentary speeches, a *Json* file containing political discourses held in the French Parliament from 1958 to 2022 was taken into consideration. The dataset was later reduced to contain only discussions in the timeframe

2010-2022, which was the most relevant for the sake of the project, and the *Json* file was transformed into a *CSV* file for simplicity. Due to computational issues, from all the texts in the new dataframe, a sample of 5000 speeches was extracted.

In order to analyze the impact of terrorist attacks on the French political discourse and on Rassemblement National, Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) was performed, and, eventually, a time trend for the word “terrorism” was created. LDA can be identified as an unsupervised learning machine algorithm that is able to extract topics and keywords from a collection of texts. It assumes that every document that is being analyzed is a collection of contents, and that each of the contents contains different words that appear with a different probability. Therefore, it was particularly relevant for the research to interpret the influence of offensive. To further comprehend it, a time trend for a specific word was created. As a matter of fact, it shows systematic change during a given period of time, in this case 2010-2022, and its goal is to understand how a variable changes its behavior in the timeframe.

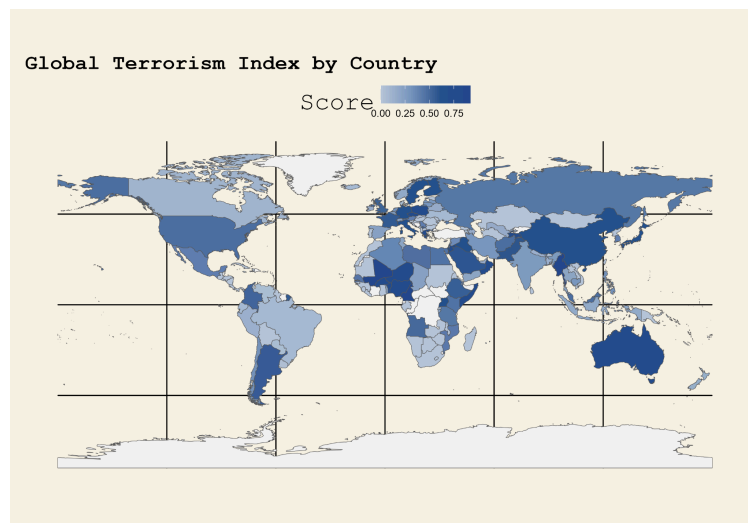


Figure 1: Global Impact of Terrorism

II: Framework

Since the beginning of the process of European integration, a number of political parties expressed distrust and hesitation towards such practice, as many believed it was a measure to counter Soviet Communism and to expand the sphere of influence of the United States into the European continent, and many were concerned about a possible loss of national sovereignty to a supranational institution, as stated by the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1988. In spite of these considerations, in 1957 the Treaty of Rome, signed by Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, entered into force, establishing the European Economic Community (E.E.C.). It had been anticipated by the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (E.C.S.C), and such agreements led to an increasing conviction that, if economy was taken into consideration, integration would have been beneficial for the States that decided to participate in the process (Alonso-Muñoz).

However, many critiques about the project were prominent, and the British Prime Minister Thatcher stated in one of her books that if a reform was not enacted, it would have been more beneficial for the United Kingdom to leave the institution and to become a member of the North American Free Trade Agreement (N.A.F.T.A)(Ozlem). The confidence towards the Union was eventually fuelled by the reunification of Germany in 1990, by the consequent fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and by the growth of a global market, which allowed the European Communities (E.C.) to succeed to the EEC, and also the entrance of other States into the agreement. Nonetheless, as the Community began to regard issues beyond economic topics, for instance with the 1992 ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, the fear of the loss of sovereignty reappeared in the European public (Beenhacker).

Since the 1990s, the European Union has enlarged its members, has adopted a common currency, and has implemented new treaties, such as the TEU (Treaty on the European Union). Moreover, in recent years, the Community has faced a number of crises

that are believed to have affected Eurosceptic feeling in domestic political parties and in citizens, the most important ones being the 2008 financial situation, the 2015 migration emergency and terrorist attacks, the decision of the United Kingdom to withdraw from the Union, and more recently, the COVID pandemic and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine (Beenhacker, Alonso-Muñoz). To exemplify, before the 2008 economic collapse, 52% of citizens regarded the EU positively, while in 2014 the percentage dropped to 31% (Ozlem), and Eurobarometer surveys held before the 2019 elections showed that the main areas of concern of European citizens were immigration (40% in 2018), terrorism (19%), and the financial situation (18%) (Alonso-Muñoz).

A. Euroscepticism

The term *Euroscepticism* indicates a sentiment of doubt and distrust towards the European Union and its policies, and could be directed to several issues depending on the political parties taken into consideration. However, there are distinct types of such a sentiment; for instance, cases in which there is a principled opposition to European integration, and the belief that the country contemplated should cease to be a member of the Institution, could be referred to as *Hard Euroscepticism*, while those in which the aversion is addressed only to distinct areas of engagement or limited to decisions implemented by the Union, can be considered as *Soft Euroscepticism*, as defined by Taggart and Szczedrzyk (Ulan).

Nevertheless, such distinction has been believed to be not sufficiently specific, and Mudde and Kopecky have distinguished between *diffuse* and *specific* support for the process of European integration. In turn, this definition includes several categorizations of attitudes, such as the *Euroenthusiasts*, who approve both the practices and the ideas; *Eurorejects*, who, in contrast, oppose both; *Eurosceptics*, who do not agree with the ways in which integration is implemented, and *Europragmatist*, a group that hardly exists as it would oppose the idea of

the EU but agree with the integration process (Vasilopoulou). Moreover, it is possible to distinguish also between *conditional* and *compromising* Euroscepticism, the first encompassing parties that believe that the EU can be a danger with regards to national sovereignty, and the latter including parties that the transfer of powers to a supranatural association of States is necessary for economical purposes (Vasilopoulou).

In spite of the classification of Eurosceptic attitudes, the main factors affecting the sentiment of suspicion could be either ideological, in which the values of the party or of the citizen are directly in contrast with the principles of the EU, or strategical, in which the ethics of the Union are added to the manifestos of political parties in order to convince the electorate of the unreliability of the Union (Ultan). However, the reasons for Eurosceptic sentiment usually differ in left and right parties' manifestos, as their concerns are typically opposed. With regards to such issues, left-wing figures are more likely to oppose socio-economic policies, while those of the right-wing affirm that EU membership entails a loss of national sovereignty and often disagree with norms that may constitute a risk for the security of their citizens (Beenhakker).

As far as terrorism is concerned, the most contested practices, apart from immigration rules, are the Schengen Agreement, ratified in 1985, and the freedom of movement within the borders of the Union.

B. Freedom of Movement

One of the founding, and recently, most discussed, characteristics of the European Union is the freedom of movement that is guaranteed between its borders for people, goods, capital, labor, and services. It is estimated that, during the years 2008-2012, the citizens who moved across member States were about 6.6 million, and in the two-year period 2014-2015, an increase to 5.3 of European residents living in another country different than the one in which they were born (Talving). The right for people to move and reside freely across the EU

was established in the Treaty of Rome, but it was expanded to other categories in the Maastricht Treaty, and it guarantees equal access to the labor market, to profitable working conditions, and to beneficial positions, as underlined by both the European Parliament and the European Commission (Roos).

Despite being implemented in the 1950s, flows of citizens reached considerable levels only in the first years of the 2000s, mainly due to the introduction of the single currency and its benefits, to the expansion of the Union to the Central and Eastern part of the continent, and, eventually, to the 2008 recession, with people moving from poorer countries to richer ones, such as the United Kingdom and Sweden, or from Southern and Eastern Europe to Northern countries. As a matter of fact, since the EU is composed of several member states, each economy experiences different costs and benefits, and those who lose from the process of integration may decide to move to another country, where they may find more working opportunities. As a matter of fact, freedom of movement was crucial in balancing the 2008 financial crisis, as it is a fundamental feature of the Single European Market, and has supported the development of the European identity (Roos).

In spite of the advantages offered by the policy, it has also raised several concerns over time. To exemplify, as wealthier States are more likely to receive more citizens, their domestic population may question the decision of the European Union to have implemented such principle, as they may perceive a loss of national identity, with high opposition percentages in Austria (27%) and Denmark (24.6%), whereas in countries which have reported lower GDP per capita approval for the measure varies between 90 and 97% (Talving). Despite the freedom of movement being a fundamental right of the EU citizens, protected by Article 45(1) of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union*¹, residency in a

¹ Article 45-Freedom of Movement and Residence; (1) *Every citizen of the Union has the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States* [Article 45 - Freedom of movement and of residence | European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#)

foreign country may be abrogated if the citizen becomes a threat to the nation or a concern for social assistance services. Furthermore, several arguments take security into consideration in order to affirm that the closure of the borders is necessary to maintain security within their country as foreigners could possibly threaten domestic order, for instance with terrorist acts, as criminality is often associated with migrants.

To exemplify, with the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the EU, the European Council, following British stances, expressed the concern that the freedom of movement could have led to illegal immigration, as migration norms were often disregarded by migrants, who, in turn, often married for convenience in order to entry the EU, presenting counterfeit documents (Roos). In addition, national Governments raised the issue of a possible downturn of the freedom of movement associated with a growing migration welfare and a decrease of the working standards, which influenced a negative public opinion on the issue, and the European Council decision to restrict equal treatment to counter deceptions and disturbances of the public order (Roos).

C. The Schengen Area and the Migration Crisis

Another feature of the European Union, which allows the Single Market to exist, was the establishment of the so-called Schengen area in 1985, whereby border controls on goods and on people were abolished in order to facilitate mobility. In fact, in 1984 France and Germany decided to revoke investigations at their frontier due to the delay in the delivery of goods, leading to the 1985 intergovernmental Schengen Agreement and the 1987 Single European Act (S.E.A.), which were expanded in the 1990s following the reunification of Germany and the abolition of controls not only for goods and services, but also for citizens within EU borders.

In 1999 the new system was integrated into the Amsterdam Treaty, which aimed for a more democratic and effective functioning of the Union (Maciejewski). One of the features of

the Agreement is the possibility for States to temporarily re-establish controls at the borders when there is the necessity to deal with emergency situations, which could arise in the State or outside its territory. For instance, in 2015-2016 European countries began to ask for derogations from the Schengen Agreement to face the migration crisis, as some States declared they could not accommodate the high number of refugees, or to prevent terrorist attacks. However, the EU responded by removing Greece from the Treaty, as the majority of migrants reached Southern European countries first, and to enhance databases to counter terrorism, disclosing the issue at external European borders. However, as the number of people seeking asylum in the EU increased to 1 million per year, starting from 600,000 applications in 2014, the first countries to decide to reinstate controls in 2015 were Austria and Germany, followed by several other States.

The measures implemented by the European Commission, namely a new system of temporarily relocation rather than the Dublin III Regulation² (2013), led European citizens and domestic governments to raise questions, also before the Court of Justice of the European Union. Moreover, States as Spain and Italy directly already had agreements with countries where the migration flow towards the Union originated, which induced the EU to be in a vulnerable position and increased Euroscepticism (Guild). In the same year, in January 2015, France was hit by a terrorist attack aimed at the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, issuing a state of emergency, to which the European Union responded with the guarantee of borders management. However, such a measure had proven to be ineffective, as five of the ten attackers active in 2015 had entered the EU either irregularly or as asylum seekers, and in 2015 France was struck by other two major offensives.

² It aims to ensure quick access to the asylum procedures and the examination of an application by a single EU country. The Regulation establishes the Member State responsible for the examination of the asylum application. [Country responsible for asylum application \(Dublin Regulation\) - European Commission](#).

Moreover, the Commission had recommended member states to broaden policy checks at the borders, but these are often carried out on racial basis, contrary to what is stated in Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)³, and the European Court allowed domestic police forces to check documents on trains and railways crossing the borders. However, as of 2021, Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, and Sweden were still protecting the entry to their territories through border control for terrorist threats, showing distrust towards the institutions of the European Union (Guild).

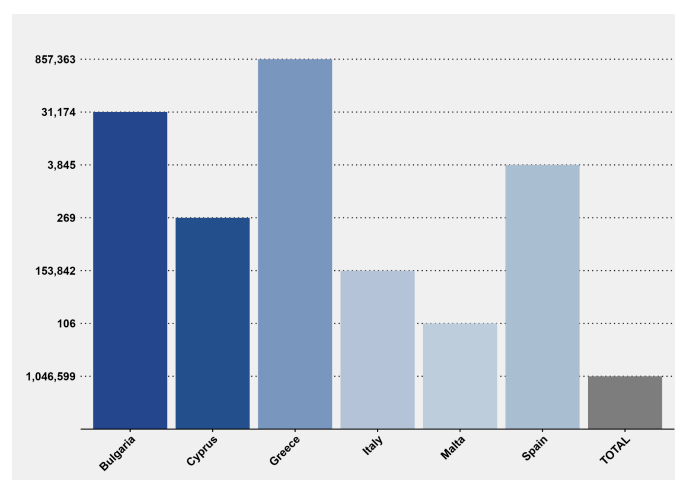


Figure 2: Countries Impacted by Immigration in 2015

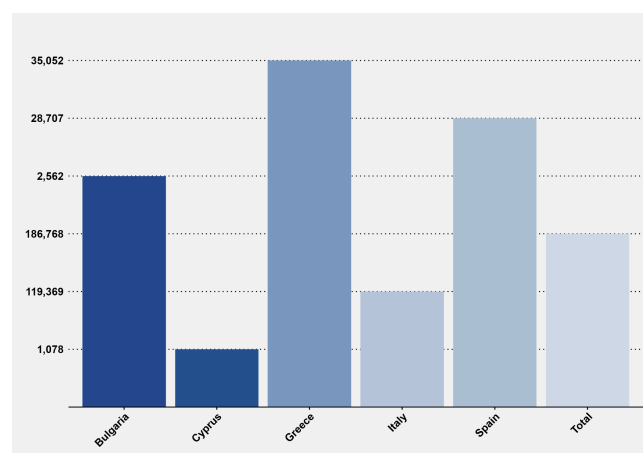


Figure 3: Countries Impacted by Immigration in 2017

³ Without prejudice to the other provisions of the Treaties and within the limits of the powers conferred by them upon the Union, the Council, acting unanimously in accordance with a special legislative procedure and after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation [EUR-Lex - 12008E019 - EN](#)

III: Terrorism and the European Union

The main aim that motivates terrorists to execute attacks, besides propagating their extremist religious beliefs, is to incite fear among the population targeted by the offensive. However, one of the consequences of such type of aggression is the development of anti-immigration sentiment and the increase of discriminatory acts, which could even reach xenophobic attitudes, towards specific minorities which reside in the country hit by the assaults. As a matter of fact, in States that have experienced forms of terrorism, citizens who have been interviewed on the topic have affirmed to have negative opinions towards both refugee and asylum seekers, and that their presence within the borders of the nation could constitute a factor of risk.

For instance, after the July 2016 attacks in Germany, 6% of respondents expressed anger towards the refugees, and 9% were more likely to fear them (Frey). Similarly, minorities in the same countries have stated to have experienced more prejudices and reactionary offenses related to hate, shown for instance by the disruption of refugee accommodation centers or discriminations in the labor market, as they were partially perceived as responsible for the attacks, a fact that negatively affected their mental well-being, increasing stress, anxiety, and depression levels which are often dealt with unhealthy coping mechanisms as the abuse of toxic substances for the human organism. 34% of people belonging to a minority in Germany affirmed to have suffered discriminatory actions, percentage that grew to 43% after the 2016 offensives, data supplemented by a general decrease in feeling welcome among the group (Frey).

A. Perceptions of Immigration

Furthermore, since most of the terrorist incursions took place between 2015 and 2017, namely when the European Union was facing the migration crisis and in many of the member-states a negative opinion towards the Institution started to grow, concerns on the

issue intensified as terrorism was regarded to be a direct impact of the increasing migration flows, which was intensified by the liberal immigration policies implemented by the EU (Frey). In turn, domestic Governments tended to enforce norms directed at contrasting the migration flows entering the country, namely closing the borders or undertaking controls, in contrast with what is stated in EU laws. However, since the media plays a crucial role in broadening the news, the impact of the attacks is more likely to spread also in States neighboring the one in which the offensive was executed, and the public is more inclined to both perceive threats to national and public safety as well and to sympathize with the population affected. The risks regard not only security, but also social cohesion and, in a minor way, the national economy and welfare state (Frey).

The immigration discourse is one of the crucial assumptions included by European right-wing parties in their manifestos, as migration and the integration process are often regarded as factors or risk for nationalism and the traditions and culture of the domestic country of the party. As a matter of fact, Eurosceptic right-wing parties argue for national sovereignty and the preeminence of the validity of the domestic law, and demand reforms of European norms that encompass the realms of the common currency, of the fiscal policies executed by the European Central Bank (ECB), of immigration and of border control. Hence, such parties could be referred to as *conditional Eurosceptics*, as they accept the principle of cooperation of the Union, but do not agree with how the principle is enacted and have reservations about the future of the Institution, and, in particular, of the process of integration. As a matter of fact, some parties as the Italian *Lega* (League) or the Danish *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish People's Party) oppose the improbable creation of a European federal State and argue that cooperation should be limited to specific areas, such as trade, the environment, and technical cooperation, which contrasts with Article 3 of the TEU⁴ (Vasilopoulou). Most of the

⁴ Treaty on the European Union, Article 3- *The Union shall be served by a single institutional framework which shall ensure the consistency and the continuity of the activities carried out*

right-wing parties that play a fundamental role in domestic policies nowadays rose as a consequence of the so-called *watershed* moments faced by Union, such as the 2008 financial crisis, the migration emergency, and the significant number of terrorist attacks suffered by member-states, as they reflected the increasing negative stance of the national public towards the EU (Mardal).

in order to attain its objectives while respecting and building upon the acquis communautaire. [CONSOLIDATED VERSION OF THE TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION](#)

IV: France as a Case Study

A. *Rassemblement National*

As far as France is concerned, the main right-wing Eurosceptic party is the *Rassemblement National* (RN), which already in the 1990s, with the reform of the TEU, was contrasting the EU, fearing it would have been a threat to national sovereignty. In the 2010s, under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the party gained increasing importance and became the second French political force, achieving 34% of consensus and attracting the lower and middle classes, affirming she would reform the Union rather than leaving it, as the original manifesto of the RN stated.

According to the party, which draws from the Gaullist parties of the 1950s, the EU is seen as a menace for domestic jurisdiction and for democracy, as the votes of the people are limited by the decisions taken in Bruxelles by *the elite*. Moreover, Le Pen stated that France should have its legislative economic, territorial, and monetary sovereignty restored, leaving the Union with few competences. One of the key discourses is the abolishment of the Schengen Agreement, which is considered to be contrasting with the interests of the States, as migration could be a menace to national identity and security and divides the French population, and multicultural societies can challenge the Government, and the only responsible for the issue is the European Union (Beenhacker, Froio).

B. The 2015 Paris Attack

The *Rassemblement National* gained popular support in the aftermaths of the refugee crisis of 2015 and of the terrorist attacks that hit Paris in the November of the same year. As a matter of fact, during the early evening of the 13th November, members of the extremist group of the Islamic State targeted the Stade of France, where a football match was being played with President Holland as a guest, and the city center, in particular near bars and restaurants. The major strike was achieved in the *Bataclan* Concert Hall, which eventually

became the symbol of the attack, where the viewers of the concert first experienced a shooting and then were held hostages until the intervention of the Special Forces. The attacks accounted for the death of 130 people and of eight terrorists, and the injury of 350 people, statistics that were limited by preparedness of French hospitals and police forces. The day after, ISIS released a statement in which affirmed the group was accountable for the attacks as the West was considered responsible for the war in the Middle East.

C. Implications

President Hollande declared a national state of emergency, prohibiting the movement of citizens and closing the borders of France, as required by the European Union (Kouri). In the RN policies, Muslims are referred to as *Others*, and Marine Le Pen has often stated that the *Islamist threat* should be contrasted by the Union in order to preserve national values, especially Christianity, as the number of immigrants within the borders of the EU is considered too high. In the aftermath of the attacks, in towns with mayors affiliated to the party there was the enactment of policies aimed to exclude Muslims to avoid threats for public safety. For instance, in Fréjus, the mayor, Mr. Rachline tried to delay the building of a mosque, and, in the summer of 2016, he banned full-length swimwear for women on beaches of the town. Many of these municipalities, especially in the north, violated the 2004 national law that expresses religious neutrality in government buildings with the exposition of Christianity scenes to defend local values. Moreover, in 2016 the RN proposed a charter which was against the admission of asylum seekers, which was eventually adopted by all French municipalities run by RN mayors. Finally, security measures were enhanced in order to avoid any other terrorist attacks, in particular incrementing police forces and their specialized trainings in case of emergencies (Peace).

D. Findings From Text Analysis

In order to assess the impact of the terrorist attack on the political discourse of *Rassemblement National* a data frame consisting of speeches of the French Parliament from 1958 to 2022 was taken into consideration. From this time frame, a selection of 5000 random texts ranging in the period 2010-2022 was analyzed in order to conduct a more focused investigation. The method selected to conduct the analysis was LDA (*Latent Dirichlet Allocation*), in order to extract relevant words and themes from the texts in the dataframe.

After the removal of French stopwords and the *tokenization* of the texts, it is possible to notice that the most used words, indicated with dark-blue, are *sécurité* (security), *travail* (work), and *français* (French). These words represent the topics that were discussed the most in French Parliamentary speeches between 2010 and 2022, demonstrating a focus on the issue of security, related to terrorist attacks and probably to immigration, work and French, which could be interpreted as the language and nationality. The last two words may relate to Euroscepticism, as they both are relevant issues in the nationalistic discourses of the *Rassemblement National*, which strives towards the protection of French traditions and of the integrity of the Nations, putting French nationals before foreigners, which are often referred to as *the Others*.

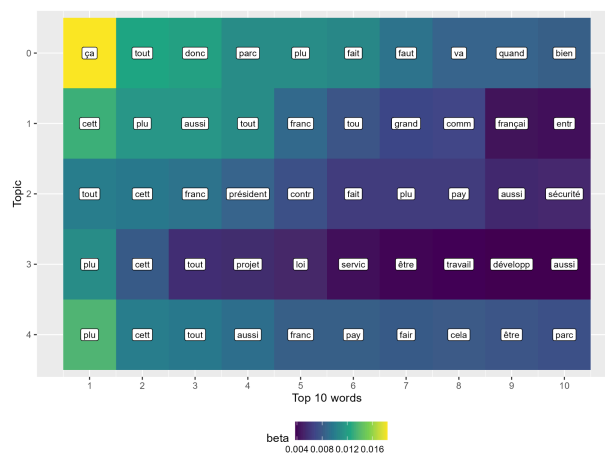


Figure 4: Most topics used in French Parliament 2010-2022

After having performed LDA, semantic coherence was executed in order to have a preview of the measurability of the topics and to measure how frequently the words appeared together in the analyzed texts. To better understand the impact of terrorist attacks on political discourses, a time trend for the use of the word *terrorism* in the Parliamentary speeches dataset was created. The trend considers the same years as the speeches, 2010-2022. It is possible to notice that before the 2015 Terror Attack, highlighted by the dotted line, the word *terrorism* was not much in use in political speeches, with the highest number of use in 2014 with a bit more than 0.011 score. However, after the attack, in 2016 the use of the word reached the highest percentage, slightly above 0.016, before decreasing again in 2017 and 2018.

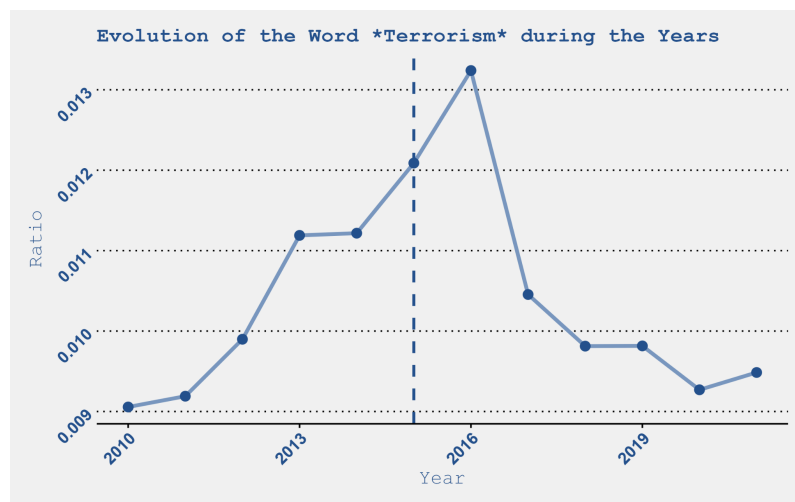


Figure 5: Time-Trend for the word “Terrorism” in France 2010-2022

V: Spain as a Case Study

As the case of Spain is concerned, the Spanish right has been fragmented and has shown signs contrary to democracy, especially due to the legacy of Francisco Franco's dictatorship, and until the beginning of the XXI century the only successful right party was *Plataforma per Catalunya*. However, such a condition changed dramatically as *Vox*, led by Santiago Abascal, entered the national panorama.

A. Vox Spain

The party was founded in 2013 as a division of the *Partido Popular* (Popular Party) and in its first manifesto its members stated its goals were to unite Spain, to seek national efficiency, to improve domestic institutions and to promote economic growth for the benefit of citizens. Its first electoral results arrived in 2018, when it gained 10% of the votes in national election and 12 seats in the Parliament of Andalucía, and was labeled by Steve Barron, Mr. Donald Trump's chief of strategy, as the *new tendency of European right parties*, and lined up with the *European Conservatives and Reformists* parties (ECR) in the European Parliament (Ferreira).

Moreover, in 2019 the group compromised with other Spanish right parties to seek an alliance, and its main aims were the reduction of national taxes, the derogation of gender and LGBT norms, the protection of Spanish traditions and culture, and the fight against illegal immigration, in particular with asylum seekers and refugees arriving from Muslim countries, openly disagreeing with the European freedom of movement and with the Schengen agreement (Ferreiro).

Another crucial point for *Vox* is sovereignty, as it accuses European Leaders, especially the French President Emmanuel Macron, and the German ex-Chancellor Angela Merkel, of pursuing only their national interests, and not those of the EU. Hence, the party advocates for a reform of the Union, in which member-states should cooperate and not follow

guidelines issued by *the elites* in Bruxelles (Alonso-Muñoz). Moreover, one of the objectives of *Vox* is to illegalize parties that promote the destruction of sovereignty and of national integrity, and wants to devote more juridical protection to national symbols such as the anthem, also known as the *Marcha Real*, the Crown, and the national flag.

The party also proposed the adoption of the so-called *principle of reciprocity*, according to which if a country does not allow Christian Churches in its territory, then the nationals of such State can not open mosques within Spanish borders, and it contrasts illegal immigration. With relations to such an issue, *Vox* suggested the deportation of foreign people that present irregularities or have committed crimes, and stated that the European borders should be inviolable for any migrant coming from non-European countries, reforming agreements with neighboring countries, subjecting them to more effective and meticulous controls (Ferreira, Mardal). Furthermore, one of the goals of *Vox* within the European framework is to enhance the European Defense Force and cooperate in joint military interventions against the Jihadi threat (Mardal).

B. 2016 Barcelona Attack

One of the main reasons behind the anti-immigration policies proposed by *Vox* and by its members, besides the defense of national culture and interests, are the terrorist attacks that took place within the country in 2016. As a matter of fact, nearly one and a half years after the Paris attacks, more precisely on August 17 and 18, 2016, in the Catalan cities of Barcelona and Cambrils by the Islamic State, which in the same period was recording defeats in Syria and Iraq. Similarly to what had happened in Nice and Berlin earlier in the year, during the afternoon on the 17th August, the terrorists aimed at running vans, which were containing munitions, over the crowd walking at *La Rambla*, Barcelona's most famous street.

However, since a bomb accidentally exploded the night before the offensive, the terrorists decided to carry out the aggression only with the aid of the vans. Similarly, in the

early morning of the day after, a truck was supposed to hit several people on the streets of Cambrils, 120 kilometers from Barcelona, and passers-by were to be attacked with the aid of knives. Moreover, the jihadists were supposed to wear belts fuelled with explosives. Nevertheless, the van overturned, and the police opened fire and killed the terrorists that were about to finalize the attacks.

After accurate and extensive research, the Spanish police established that both the offensive of Barcelona and Cambrils had been organized by Abdelbaki as-Satty, who had previously been imprisoned in Spain for the trafficking of illegal substances from Africa to Spain. Once he was released, he became the imam of a mosque in the town of Ripoll, in Catalunya, where he met the other individuals involved in the offensive, and proceeded to convert them to radical Islam and made them commit to the achievement of the attack (Bak).

VI: Conclusions

Since the early establishment of the European Union, several citizens of member-states, along with a number of politicians, were opposed to its foundation. The main arguments against it were based on the fear of the loss of national sovereignty and the concerns that the project would have led to a complete control of the United States in the European continent in order to contrast Soviet expansion in the West and the spread of Communism in the American sphere of influence.

However, with the creation of the European Economic Community (ECC) and of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), a number of countries were persuaded by the benefits offered by the Community in the economic realm, and the Union started to include more States. A further advance in European integration was given also by the unification of Germany and by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which gave rise to different new countries in the eastern part of the Continent. However, with the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which established the European Union, Eurosceptic voices, which were already prominent in political discourses all over Europe, started to gain importance.

Eventually, Euroscepticism was fuelled by *watershed* moments experienced by the EU, in particular by the 2008 financial crisis, which forced member-states to face the consequences of an economic recession, by the 2015-2016 refugee emergency, by Brexit, and, more recently, by the COVID Pandemic and by the war in Ukraine. Despite this, most Eurosceptic discourses vary depending on the principles pursued by left- and right-wing political parties, as exponents of the left are more concerned with social policies and with the costs of the European economy, while proponents of the right-wing establish their agendas on a potential loss of national jurisdiction and local identity deriving from the continuous process of European integration.

Furthermore, right wing parties tend to contrast policies and norms that allow the free movement of goods, services, and people within European borders, such as the Schengen Agreement of 1985 and the freedom of movement, which is considered to be one of the fundamental rights from which European citizens profit. Immigration is one of the crucial points mentioned in right-wing discourse against the European Union, as it is argued that people entering European member-states from non-member countries, especially from Islamic countries, constitute a threat for national security and for the defense of traditional values, such as Christianity, and of domestic identity. In particular, such argument has been increasingly used in the aftermaths of attacks carried out by the Islamic State in main European cities between 2015 and 2017, a period of time in which the Union was facing the entry of a record-high number of refugees and asylum seekers.

In particular, the French *Rassemblement National* (RN) and the Spanish *Vox*, which gained relevance in the 2010s, both based their Eurosceptic stances also on the terrorist attacks which had been carried out in Paris, Barcelona, and Cambrils. The parties identified migrants with the terrorist hazard, and both held the European Union responsible for the offensive, as it had enabled the norms regarding immigration that allowed migrants to enter their countries, such as the Dublin Regulation III, that proved to be ineffective in the relocation of migrants in European countries. As far as the *Rassemblement National* and France are concerned, it is crucial to look at the findings of the analysis of 5000 Parliamentary discourses in the timeframe 2010-2022. The main topics of these discourses regard security and the word “French”, meaning that nationalism was a crucial factor in this time frame. What is more, after the 2015 Paris attack, the word *terrorism* became prominent again in French political discourse, underlining a major impact of the attack on national politics.

Due to these factors, both the RN and *Vox* have requested laws and policies of the EU which regard immigration and national security to be reformed, openly describing themselves as Eurosceptic parties. Finally, both parties also advocate for the restoration of national sovereignty and for the restraint of cooperation between European members to specific common areas of interest, arguing that topics similar to border control should be governed by national governments in order to prevent threats to public security that could enter the State from foreign and non-European countries, such as it was demonstrated by the terrorist attacks carried out by the Islamic State that hit France in 2015 and Spain in 2016.

To conclude, it is possible to state that terrorism has an extensive impact on the agendas of right-wing parties, which exploit the issue to aid their discourse against European integration and policies, as it is being confirmed by the manifestos and the speeches of the leaders of the French *Rassemblement National* and by the Spanish *Vox*.

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