

THE EMOTIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF EXTREME RIGHT IN SPAIN. THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN ANDALUSIA, CATALONIA, AND CASTILE AND LEON

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to determine the emotional construction of the far-right electorate, from a constructivist perspective, at different moments of political competition in Spain—specifically, in the regional elections of Andalusia in 2018, Catalonia in 2021, and Castile and León in 2022. For this purpose, research has been designed with a quantitative methodological approach based on the analysis of the results of three demographic studies carried out by the EIP-USC, in which the emotions expressed towards political parties acquire a fundamental value. The results obtained allow us to visualize the existence of an emotional regime common to VOX voters in our country, which presents different emotional architectures depending on the political moment. These architectures are shaped both by the presence of positive emotions towards their own political party and other right-wing and center-right parties, and by the notable presence of negative emotions towards left-wing and independent parties.

KEYWORDS

polarization; emotions; emotional regime; emotional architecture.

LA CONSTRUCCIÓN EMOCIONAL DE LA EXTREMA DERECHA EN ESPAÑA. LAS ELECCIONES AUTONÓMICAS DE ANDALUCÍA, CATALUÑA Y CASTILLA Y LEÓN

Como citar este artículo / Citation: Lagares Díez, Nieves, María Pereira López y Erika Jaráiz Gulias (2024). The emotional construction of extreme right in Spain. The regional elections in Andalusia, Catalonia, and Castile and Leon, *Revista Internacional de Sociología* 82 (4): e261. <https://doi.org/10.3989/ris.2024.82.4.1302>

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Recibido: 29/11/2023. Aceptado: 18/09/2024.

Publicado: 04/02/2025

RESUMEN

La finalidad que persigue esta investigación es determinar la construcción emocional del electorado de extrema derecha, desde una perspectiva constructivista, en diferentes momentos de competición política en España. Concretamente, en las elecciones autonómicas de Andalucía 2018, Cataluña 2021 y Castilla y León, 2022. Para ello se ha diseñado una investigación con un enfoque metodológico cuantitativo sustentado en el análisis de los resultados de tres estudios demoscópicos realizados por el EIP-USC, en los cuales las emociones expresadas hacia partidos políticos adquieren un valor fundamental. Los resultados obtenidos permiten visualizar la existencia de un régimen emocional común a los votantes de VOX en nuestro país, que presenta diferentes arquitecturas emocionales según el momento político. Dichas arquitecturas se conforman tanto por la presencia de emociones positivas hacia su formación y otras formaciones de derecha y centroderecha, como por la notable presencia de emociones negativas hacia los partidos de izquierda e independentistas.

PALABRAS CLAVE

polarización; emociones; régimen emocional; arquitectura emocional.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, the phenomenon of the extreme right has spread throughout Europe, even in countries where it had been relegated to the margins of the system. VOX is the party that represents this family of parties in Spain. It is a party with a conservative tradition whose emergence dates from 2012 from the Reconversión.es platform, led by former militants and leaders of the Partido Popular (PP), including VOX's current leader, Santiago Abascal, and the former PP MEP, Alejo Vidal-Cuadras. This group was particularly critical of the "moderate" tendency headed by the then leader of the PP, Mariano Rajoy, which led to his departure and the formation of the platform. One year later, on 17 September 2013, VOX was registered as a political party.

After competing in the 2014 European elections, where they did not obtain representation, in September, Santiago Abascal became president of the party. After running in the 2015 Andalusian regional and Spanish general elections, without obtaining representation in either election, VOX eventually won parliamentary representation for the first time in the 2018 Andalusian regional elections. During this time, the political radicalization of the party took place, marked by the participation, in January 2017, of its leader in a well-publicized meeting of the European populist radical right in Germany. Since then, and after electoral success at a national level in April 2019, VOX has achieved representation in all the autonomous parliaments, with the sole exception of Galicia.

The process of the extreme right's institutional penetration of in Spain, framed in the fourth wave of this family of parties (Mudde 2019)¹, has been related to another debate, that of the growth of the political and affective polarization of the system; and the consequences that this entails for the democratic political system (Arbatli and Rosenberg 2020; Graham and Svulik 2020). Through its discourse, the far right introduces semantics that provoke negative emotions among its electorate, especially towards its political opponents, exacerbating existing political divides or even creating new ones (Arbatli and Rosenberg 2020), causing not only polarization, but also a kind of political sectarianism (Finkel et al. 2020). This can be seen clearly in VOX, whose discursive evolution has been characterized by an increase in emotional presence, especially negative (López-López and González 2020; Bretones and Martí 2020), which in turn has been transferred to the voting decision of its voters (Castro and Jaráiz 2022; Oñate, Pereira and Mo 2022), as well as the entire political system.

1 The rise of these parties in the European context has been explained as the result of a set of structural factors; however, events specific to national politics condition to what degree and in which way the extreme right has been established in each country.

EMOTIONS IN POLITICS

The revival of the study of the emotional component

The affective turn that the social sciences have undergone since 1980 has led to the re-examination of the role of emotions in political explanation—a fact that not only meant a re-reading of the mind–body relationship, but also the need to overcome the “hyper-rationalism” present in the social sciences (Arias Maldonado 2016) and with it, the need to reconsider affections, overcoming the rationalist individualistic perspective that prevents us from understanding the construction of the collective (Máiz 2011).

This revival of the study of emotions has had a profoundly multidisciplinary character that has led to a significant number of publications around two paradigms: firstly, the cognitivist vision influenced by political and cognitive psychology, which proposes a reactive vision of emotions (Marcus, Neuman and Mackuen 2000); and secondly the constructivist vision dominated by the sociological vision of the emotional construction (Armon-Jones 1985; Averill 1980). Both approaches have contributed significantly to the recent study of the affective component in politics.

There are two issues that have been notably present in this new stage: firstly, the theoretical debate on the relationship between emotions and reason; and secondly, the development of tools for measuring and quantifying emotions. Regarding the first question, we support a complementary vision of the relationship between reason and emotion (Máiz 2010) that breaks with the previous exclusionary duality. Thus, we assume the existence of a biological basis in emotions, that is essential and universal, while accepting their socio-cultural dimension (Mihai 2016). These two assumptions place this research on the fine line between the soft views of cognitivism and constructivism.

However, there is a methodological difficulty in measuring the weight of emotions, a fact that extends to the literature on emotions and politics in general (Pereira, Lagares and López-López 2021), as well as the few studies focused on the emotions linked to extreme far-right political parties. Regarding this methodological issue, we have found that some studies have analyzed emotions in an aggregate way, alluding to the existence of different emotional components according to their valence, meaning, and activation from a cognitive point of view (Marcus, Neuman and Mackuen 2000, 2017); while other studies have approached the study of emotions in a discrete way (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2015).

Two emotions of negative valence have received the most attention: fear and anger. Anger has always been considered the essential political emotion (Lyman 1981: 61), as it is seen as a key element for political participation (van Stekelenburg et al. 2011;

van Zomeren et al. 2004). It becomes a useful tool for candidates during electoral campaigns, allowing them to influence voters, while legitimizing candidates and reaffirming the loyalty of activists (Ballet 2021). It is, therefore, an emotion that could act as a catalyst for voting for the far right, as it is an emotion traditionally identified with this family of parties (Vasilopoulos et al. 2018a, 2018b). It is also a mobilising emotion (Valentino et al. 2011) that can lead people to take risks they would not otherwise take (Lerner and Keltner 2001). Furthermore, because it is an emotion that tends to reinforce political predispositions through its biasing effect on political information (Suhay and Erisen 2018), it acts as a driver of polarization, as political and ideological positions are reinforced.

Since Aristotle, fear has been defined as a mixture of pain and helplessness in the face of a threatening situation. It is an emotion that invites the individual to be more cautious and to avoid risk (Lerner and Tiedens 2006), initiating the threat avoidance procedure, increasing attention to new information and, consequently, facilitating learning (Lerner and Keltner 2001; Valentino et al. 2008). This learning would displace the habits and automatisms of political behavior to assist further information processing in decision-making (Brader 2006; Huddy, Feldman and Casesse 2007). Crigler, Just and Belt (2006) point out that fear expressed towards a political opponent combined with hope towards the voter's preferred candidate would encourage citizens to pay more attention to campaign information.

In understanding the levels of polarization of a political system, we attach great importance to the effect of an emotion such as contempt, which belongs to the group of so-called moral emotions (Shweder et al. 1997). This emotion is built on negative evaluations, acting as a distancing element from a group that does not contribute value or is inferior (Izard 1977; Fischer and Giner-Sorolla 2016). This effect involves the denial of the "other" and, in the face of emotions such as hatred, it gives the person expressing this emotion a supposed superiority over the "despised" person, which speaks to an absence of respect and recognition.

While negative emotions have gained more attention, there is one positive emotion that has developed significantly: hope. This is a prospective affect that evokes a state of mind based on expectations of achieving a favorable outcome, which is composed of two cognitive elements that allow the understanding of what is presented: the belief that an event is possible and the objective of the event (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2015: 161). Hope intervenes by encouraging action, but also acts as a sustainer in time of individual or collective actions (Averill, Catlin and Chon 1990: 284)². It is, therefore, one of the emotions

2 And here lies the fundamental difference—it has enthusiasm, which is a temporary and ephemeral affect.

with the greatest political implications, linking expectations with citizens' future goals with respect to the democratic process (Barber 1972). In practice, this link would translate into an individual disposition to seek information during the electoral campaign, as a reinforcement of previous predispositions, which, anchored to a leader or a party, would function as a facilitator of the vote (Just, Crigler and Belt 2007).

Emotions and the extreme right

One of the relevant issues in the literature on the extreme right has been the study of leadership, and more specifically, the populist style. From an emotional point of view, far-right leadership has been analyzed from both a positive and a negative valence perspective. In the first case, this has been done by pointing out how far-right leaders, by adopting a populist style, become saviors (Betz 2001; Eatwell 2006) of an unfavorable economic and social situation, arousing hope among their followers. In the second case, by presenting themselves as the antithesis of traditional parties and politicians, these leaders stir up emotions such as fear, anger, contempt (Fieschi and Heywood 2004: 291), or resentment (Betz 1990) in the electorate towards this political class, whom they see as benefactors of various groups they oppose. The result is a polarized emotional construct established in two directions: the rejection of mainstream political forces and emotional attachment among the followers of these groups.

Accounting for this reaction is no easy task, but in recent years some interesting work has emerged, especially for its notoriety in its approach to an emotional theory of politics from the field of psychology (Vasilopoulos et al. 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Jost 2019; Marcus et al. 2019). These authors have addressed the relationship of negative emotions—fear and anger—that emerged in response to the Al Qaeda terrorist attacks in Paris at the headquarters of the satirical weekly publication *Charlie Hebdo* with the shaping of authoritarian attitudes and, consequently, the support expressed for the far right. Along the same lines, the importance of anger in contemporary politics and its relationship with populism has been pointed out (Marx 2020).

Some studies highlight the presence of negative emotions—anger or concern—pointing to structural elements³ as the key factors that lead citizens to expe-

3 Individuals would blame mainstream parties for transformations in the productive sectors and the lack of opportunities or precarious working conditions; for migratory movements and the effects these would have on the labour market, security or culture; and/or for the change behind the pre-eminence of traditional lifestyles. As a result of this discontent, voters would end up opting for political alternatives embodying the defence of the nation, nativist economics, or conventional values and lifestyles.

rience these emotions and, consequently, to manifest a certain sense of uprootedness or political disaffection. However, the conclusion does not always point in that direction. Rivera and Pereira (2020) show that VOX voters do not express statistically different levels of disaffection compared to other voters, and that, in contrast, they are the type of voter who is interested in politics and is deeply emotional.

In Spain, several studies have focused on the links between emotions and political behavior: Rico, Guinjoan and Anduiza (2017, 2020) and Rico (2024) addressed the nature of support for populist groups through the study of fear and anger, revealing the importance of the latter as a key factor in activating these attitudes. Pereira, Lagares and Mo (2022) identified the links that are established between the expression of populist attitudes towards the system and negative emotions towards leaders and political parties. Meanwhile, Rivera, Castro and Mo (2021) analyzed the impact of the affective component on the vote for VOX in the 2018 Andalusian elections, while Cazorla and Jaráiz (2020) and Oñate, Pereira and Mo (2022) focused on the effect that positive emotions (tranquility and hope) towards Santiago Abascal (Jaráiz, Castro and Colomé 2022) and towards VOX (Castro and Jaráiz 2022) would have on the vote in general elections. It is evident that not only the positive affective component influences this decision, but also the negative emotional component towards antagonistic groups and leaders.

This opposing emotional construct is often transferred to other constructs such as political leadership or party identification: in the first case through the enthusiasm aroused by Santiago Abascal (Jaráiz, Castro and González 2022), and the negative emotions of anxiety and hatred towards Pablo Iglesias (Lagares and Mo 2020) and Pedro Sánchez, respectively; in the second, through the effect of the dimension of enthusiasm towards the national leader and the party, but also anxiety towards other right-wing and center-right leaders such as Pablo Casado or Albert Rivera (Lagares and Castro 2020).

It is in this space of ideological confrontation where research on emotions connects with the literature on ideological polarization, but on affective polarization. It is a space that has generated works that have tried to address the importance of the affective dimension in political polarization in Spain (Rojo 2023; Rojo, Crespo and Mora 2023). Some of them (Torcal 2023; Torcal and Thomson 2023) propose the analysis of affective polarization by incorporating the measurement of discrete emotions expressed towards leaders and parties, breaking with the classic approach based on the measurement of attitudes.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to try to determine how the emergence of VOX is associated with

an emotional construction that involves a common emotional regime constructed through different emotional architectures based on the context of political competition that the group has experienced at any given moment. To this end, we analyzed three key moments for this political party: a) the 2018 regional elections in Andalusia, the first autonomous community in which VOX gained seats in a Parliament; b) the 2021 regional elections in Catalonia, with the *procés* as the framework of competition and a key element in the formation of VOX; and c) the 2022 regional elections in Castile and León, in coalition with the PP. The selection of these three moments is justified by the importance that these moments have for the understanding of VOX's political and electoral evolution. The selection criterion lies in the fact that the results obtained in said elections' electoral processes have been fundamental in understanding the longitudinal settlement process of the party at a national level, given the support that said milestones supposed in terms of obtaining political, governmental, and parliamentary power. For this reason, we speak of the importance of the moment and the context in which the different elections analyzed take place.

We start from two concepts taken from Lagares, Máiz and Rivera (2022)—emotional regime and emotional architecture—who, based on Reddy (2001), define these as follow:

[...] the emotional regime refers to the emotional components of a situation—what emotions are present—while the emotional architecture refers to how much and how these emotions are distributed, how much of each emotion is present and with what intensity] (Máiz and Rivera 2022:26)

This is based on an assumption of the social nature of emotions, the constructivist idea that in a community emotions are not felt in an isolated, reflexive, and individual way, but rather collectively, that they respond to a community construction, which generates the framework predominant emotional. Analytically, the emotional regime is expressed through the emotions that have the greatest presence in a community at a given moment.

From our general objective, the following research questions can be derived:

- Are there, because of the political context in which they are framed, different emotional regimes for VOX voters in the regional elections in Andalusia, Catalonia, and Castile and León?
- Are there, because of the political context in which they are framed, different emotional architectures for VOX voters in the regional elections in Andalusia, Catalonia, and Castile and León?
- What is the influence of the emotional component on voting for VOX at these three specific moments?

To illustrate our objective, we resorted to a descriptive, multivariate analysis through the data collected in polls conducted by the Political Research Team of the USC (EIP-USC) (Table 1). The questionnaires were ad hoc, sharing a series of sections, which have been compared; they also have a series of specific sections that reflect the scenario of each of the contexts in which they were administered.

Table 1.
Technical data of the surveys

Opinion Poll	Technical characteristics
Post-electoral barometer for the 2018 Regional Elections in Andalusia (BAPEAA, 2018)	Dates: from January 28 to March 4th 2019. Universe: persons aged 18 and over living in Andalusia. Sample size: 1200. Assumptions: p=q. Associated error: $\pm 2.83\%$. Allocation: proportional (strata: sex, age, and province). Mode of survey: telephone survey using the CATI system.
Post-electoral Survey 2021 Regional Elections in Catalonia (EPEAC, 2021)	Dates: from March 17 to April 28 2021. Universe: persons aged 18 and over living in Catalonia. Sample size: 1000. Assumptions: p=q. Associated error: $\pm 3.16\%$. Allocation: proportional (strata: sex, age and province). Mode of survey: telephone survey using the CATI system
Politics, Emotions ad Coalitions in Castile and León 2023 (EPECCL, 2023)	Dates: from May 5 to 5 June 2023. Universe: persons aged 18 and over living in Castile and León. Sample size: 400. Assumptions: p=q. Associated error: $\pm 5\%$. Allocation: proportional (strata: sex, age, and province). Mode of survey: telephone survey using the CATI system.

Source: Own preparation. Databank EIP-USC.

The three studies included a battery of thirteen emotions, the presence, intensity, and duration of which were considered.⁴ Emotions can be grouped into three components, according to their valence, meaning, and the cognitive system they activate:

- Enthusiasm dimension (dispositional system, positive valence): enthusiasm, hopefulness, pride, and calmness.
- Anxiety dimension (vigilance system, negative valence): anxiety, anger, fear, and worry.

4 Emotional presence is measured by means of a nominal question (Yes/No). If the answer is yes, the intensity with which this emotion has been felt is asked on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest level of intensity and 5 the highest level). Finally, respondents are asked whether this emotional expression lasts over time (Yes/No).

- Aversion dimension (dispositional system, negative valence): bitterness, disgust, disappreciation, hatred, and resentment.

This measurement formula is based on the approach proposed by Marcus, Neuman and Mackuen in 2000 and developed in 2017. This choice allows for a dual perspective on emotions: discrete, measuring each of them independently; and joint, based on the existing valence association between them, which would allow their association in emotional components.⁵

EMERGENCE AND RISE OF THE EXTREME RIGHT IN SPAIN: THE CASE OF VOX

For some years, Spain and Portugal were the so-called Iberian exception due to the absence of extreme far-right parties in their institutions, although in the end both countries have ended up incorporating this type of party into the political competition.

In 2018, when VOX obtained representation in the Andalusian regional parliament, it began a journey that has allowed it to establish itself in political institutions within a short period of time. Although notable works have been published on the political evolution of this party at a national level (Castro and Jaráiz 2022), we believe that there are three key moments in this process that are worth analyzing.

Entering the institutions: regional elections in Andalusia 2018

The regional elections of 2 December 2018 marked a turning point in Andalusian politics. After more than forty years of hegemonic government by the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), the pact between PP, Ciudadanos (C's), and VOX would give rise to an alternative government for the first time. Since the appearance in the Congress of Deputies of Fuerza Nueva in 1982, no extreme right-wing party had achieved parliamentary representation at either the national or regional level. Its emergence in Andalusia with 10.97% of the vote and 12 seats would be the beginning of VOX's rise.

The president at that time, Susana Díaz, and her socialist government at the head of the regional government had had to face important governmental and organizational challenges. Given this weakness, it is not surprising that these elections put an end to the socialist hegemony in the Junta which had been present since 1982, despite the progressive electoral decline that had forced them to reach a government agreement with other parliamentary forces in 2012 and 2015.

5 For more information: Jaráiz, Lagares and Pereira (2020); Pereira, Lagares and López-López (2021) and Castro and Jaráiz (2022).

Although the Andalusian campaign had its own logic, we cannot ignore a certain nationalization of these elections, coinciding with the first successful motion of censure in the history of Spanish democracy, at a time of great territorial tension, due to the trial over the unauthorized referendum in Catalonia. After the motion of censure and the investiture of Pedro Sánchez as president and the end of the application of Article 155 of the Constitution, which intervened in the autonomy of Catalonia, there was a change in the roadmap of the *procés*, which would have affected *Ciudadanos'* decision to break the agreement it had reached with the PSOE in Andalusia. A month later, *Ciudadanos* would add to this decision the presentation of a non-legislative motion to urge the government to re-apply Article 155 in Catalonia. In this national context, Susana Díaz called regional elections.

The influence of national and Catalan politics on the Andalusian elections was evident. Therefore, it would be in Andalusia where the threat to national unity would give way to the extreme right. A theme that would become the main axis of *VOX's* discourse and a central element of the support of its voters (Rivera, Castro and Mo 2021; Castro and Jaráiz 2022) was a kind of "Spanish nativism" that found the enemy of the nation not to be immigrants but pro-independence Catalans and all those citizens or political actors who in one way or another sympathize with this cause.

VOX in Catalan parliament 2021, opposition to the *procés*

The Catalan regional elections of 2021 were called in a context marked by the Covid-19 pandemic. The crisis had weakened the claims of a regional divided government that had made no significant progress in its dialogue with the central government. The easing of the tension between both governments came about because of various events that conditioned the political competition: the protests carried out by the Committees for the Defence of the Republic to demand the release of imprisoned politicians and the ERC's amendment to the State budget in its entirety.

Finally, following the addition of the PDeCAT to the motion of rejection of the budgetary bill, the Sanchez administration considered the negotiations with the pro-independence parties to be broken. This coincided with the beginning of the *procés* trial. The call for general elections for April 2019 was precipitated in a climate that once again encouraged the process with various interventions by the electoral boards.

The impossibility of forming a government forced a new call for elections in November. Between the call for the elections and actually holding them, the Supreme Court sentenced those accused of the *procés* to prison terms for the crime of sedition. This sentencing produced a new explosion of pro-

tests called by *Tsunami Democràtic*, which was then responded to in the demonstration called by *Societat Civil Catalana*.

During this wave of tension, general elections were held. A few days later, the TSJC sentenced the Catalan president for a charge of disobedience, which would lead to the announcement of the call for early regional elections. This is a decision that would be postponed due to the arrival of Covid-19. It was Pere Aragonés who replaced Quim Torra at the head of the Government until the elections were held on 14 February 2021. In these elections, the pro-independence parties—*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC)*, *Junts per Catalunya (Junts)*, and *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP)*—together obtained more than 50% of the votes, even though the party with the most votes was the *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC)*. As had happened in the general elections of November 2019, *C's* collapsed, in the context in which it was born, going from 36 to 6 MPs; and *VOX* became one of the beneficiaries, bursting into Parliament for the first time, with 7.69% of the votes and 11 MPs. The far right positioned itself as the main anti-independence actor, capitalising on *C's* former space.

First government, regional elections of Castile and Leon 2022

The scenario that emerged after the regional elections in Castilla y León on 13 February 2022 has proved to be fundamental in understanding the consolidation of the extreme right in Spain. *VOX* obtained 17.64% of the vote in these elections and 13 seats, a position that allowed it to form part of an autonomous government for the first time.

The call for elections⁶ came after the president, Fernández Mañueco, backed by the national leader of the PP, dismissed three councillors, all of them *C's* members. This decision was justified as a response to the threat of a censure motion, orchestrated by PSOE, *C's*, *Podemos*, and *Por Ávila*. For the Popular Party, this operation represented disloyalty on the part of *C's*, with whom they had been governing since 2019, to which were added the tensions between the two parties in the communities of Murcia and Madrid, where they also shared the government. Once again, national politics took centre stage in elections in which the national leaders of the PP and *VOX* took an active part, giving rise to elections of change in the electoral history of this community (Merino and Castaños 2019).

The PP once again became the party most voted for, albeit with its worst result in history. Finally, and after much reticence on the part of this party, a government agreement was forced through in extremis between the two parties on 10 March 2022, minutes

6 For the first time the president used his prerogative to call early elections and open a new electoral cycle.

before the Cortes was constituted. The far right made its entrance into government.

EMOTIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF VOTERS

Emotional architectures: positive emotions

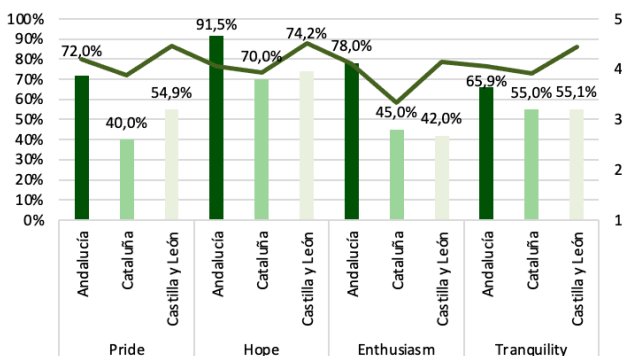
The descriptive analysis (Figures 1–3)⁷ defines the existence of an emotional regime marked by the presence of positive emotions, especially hope and enthusiasm towards their own party, as well as towards the PP (hope and pride) and C’s (hope). This regime presents different architectures, in terms of presence and intensity.

One of the common elements in these three moments is the presence of hope towards training as a backbone of positive affections. This is an emotion that looks to the future, and which explains, very well in this case, the reality of an “exciting” context for the voters of this party, encouraging action and facilitating voting, as we will see.

However, the hope for VOX manifests in different levels of presence and intensity in the three cases, especially in the case of Andalusia, where it reaches 91.5% of presence. For their part, the rest of the positive emotions have high levels of presence, above 65% in all cases, although enthusiasm (Catalonia) or calmness (Castile and Leon) alternate second place, depending on the context. The lowest levels of intensity of the set of positive emotions are those observed in 2022 in Castile and Leon. This refers to an “emotional tempering” when the party is already present in the institutional system, perhaps indicative of a certain normalization on the part of the electorate as well.

Figure 1.

Positive emotions of VOX voters towards the party⁸

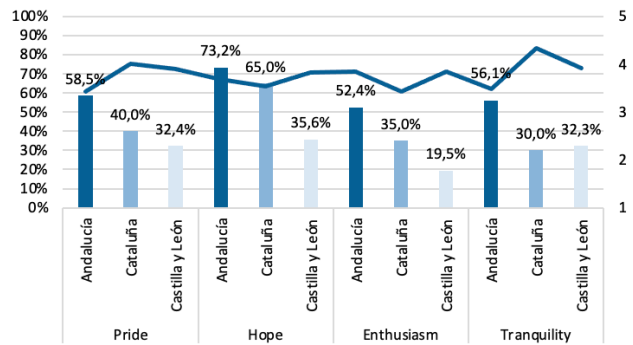


Source: own elaboration.

7 In Castile and Leon, positive emotions towards C’s were not included in the database. After the elections, the party practically disappeared, going from 11 deputies to 1, so the sample of voters in the study was very small.
 8 In all figures the bars represent the presence (% 0-100) and the trend line, the intensity (1-5).

Figure 2.

Positive emotions of VOX voters towards the PP

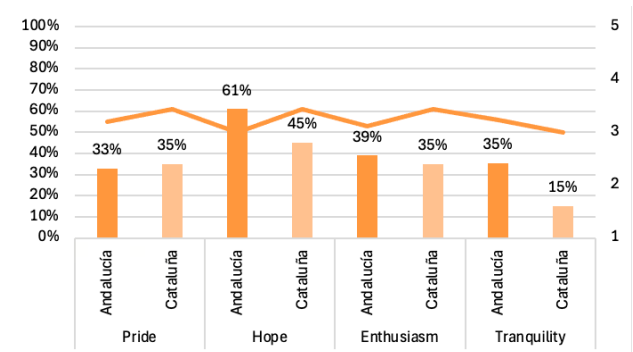


Source: own elaboration.

This affective structure is complemented by high levels of presence and intensity of positive emotions towards other right-wing parties. Specifically, medium levels of hope and pride towards the PP are observed in all three moments, and these are higher in the Andalusian context (58–73% compared to 30–45% in the other two cases). In the case of C’s, the two emotions that concentrate the highest levels of presence are hope and enthusiasm. This data can be partly explained by the fact that, initially, VOX was nourished by voters from PP (mostly) and C’s. As an example, in Andalusia, almost 64.6% of voters came from PP, with 20% still presenting identification.

Figure 3.

Positive emotions of VOX voters towards Ciudadanos



Source: own elaboration.

Emotional architectures: negative emotions

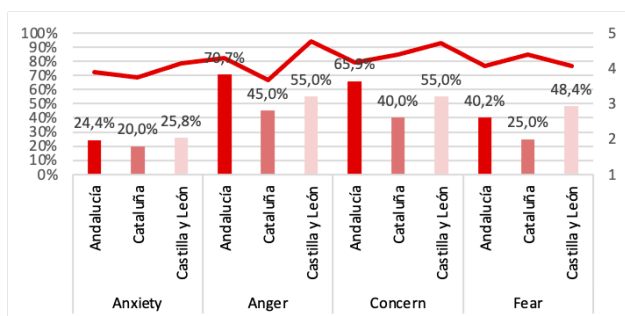
Two dimensions can be added to the positive emotional structure described: the presence of negative emotions, and to a lesser extent (average percentages between 9–23%), of very negative emotions (resentment and contempt) towards left-wing political parties. In this way, an emotional regime built on emotions of positive and negative valence is established, an issue that was already present in previous studies carried out in the national context (Castro and Jaráiz 2022) and in the regional context (Rivera, Castro and

Mo 2021) for this party, as well as for other parties in our country (Jaráiz, Lagares and Pereira 2020) or outside of it (Breeze 2019). The notable presence of these types of emotions supports the idea of a polarization with an important negative emotional composition which pivots on ideological extremes, and which is more evident in those contexts such as Catalonia where there are strong political parties, natural antagonists of the extreme right.

Two negative emotions expressed towards left-wing parties are dominant—anger and concern (percentages above 38%)—to which we should add fear. Despite this common regime, we observe differences between contexts. Firstly, it is worth highlighting the high percentages of anger and concern that VOX voters expressed towards the PSOE in 2018: 65.5% in the case of concern and 70.7% in the case of anger. These are values that in some cases are twenty percentage points higher than those expressed towards other left-wing parties such as Adelante Andalucía (AA), En Comú Podem (ECP), or Podemos-IU. Secondly, it is important to note that while in the case of Andalusia and Castile and Leon negative emotions are expressed with higher percentages towards the PSOE than towards other left-wing parties, in the case of Catalonia, this pattern is reversed. The literature has pointed out how sometimes the expression of certain emotions, such as worry and anger, generate mutually reinforcing effects. The former has been described as an anticipatory emotion in the face of the probability of a future threat, which can lead to the expression of anger and ultimately lead to mobilization.

Figure 4.

Negative emotions of VOX voters towards the PSOE



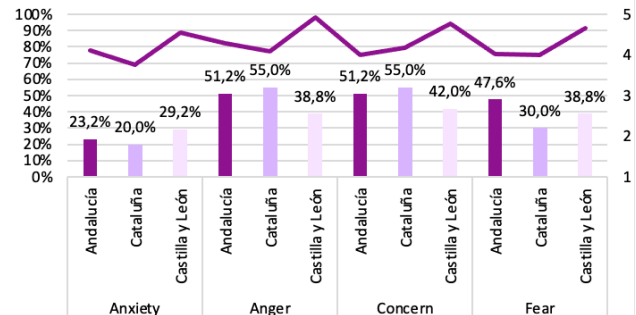
Source: own elaboration.

This negative emotionality is complemented by emotions that refer to the aversion component. In general terms, the percentages of presence are lower than those expressed in the case of anxiety emotions. The two dominant emotions in the three contexts are resentment and contempt, to which disgust is added in 2018. The first two emotions are expressed to a greater extent towards extreme left-wing parties in these three key moments. As specific patterns, we observe higher percentages in the Catalan and Castile-Leon contexts, reaching 40% in the case of con-

tempt for the ECP. This hostile emotionality would contribute significantly to a strong polarization (Humprecht, Hellmueller and Lischka 2020), previously present in the political debate itself.

Figure 5.

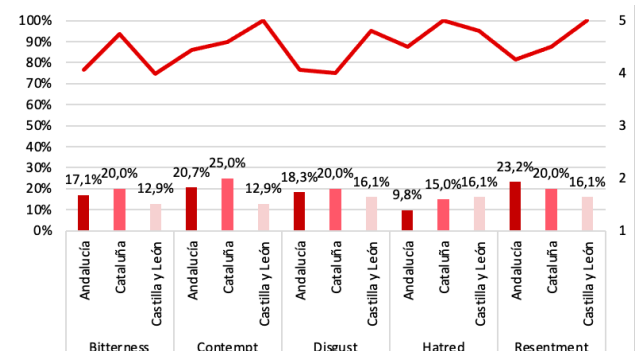
Negative emotions of VOX voters towards extreme left-wing parties⁹



Source: own elaboration.

Figure 6.

Aversive emotions of VOX voters towards the PSOE

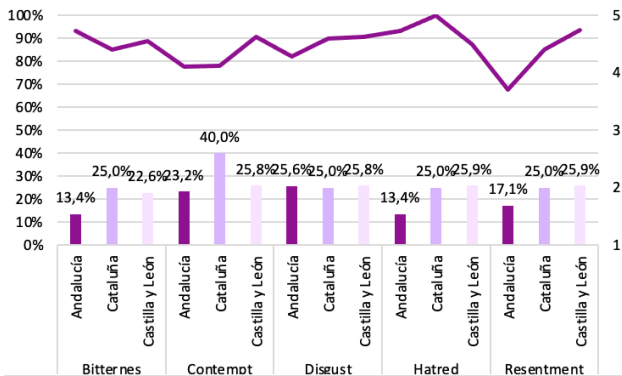


Source: own elaboration.

Although the percentages of the presence do not exceed 26%, except in the case mentioned above, and are, in comparison with what has been said about the emotions of anxiety, notably lower, if we compare them with the percentages expressed by voters of other parties prior to the appearance of VOX (Pereira, Lagares and López-López 2021), they are slightly higher. This data would suggest a change in the constitution of the general emotional regime of the Spanish political system after the emergence of VOX. As for the high intensities, they should not surprise us, as they largely respond to the small number of cases and, consequently, to the polarization of the voter profile, intimately attached to his or her party and with a deep dislike for the opposition parties.

9 This figure shows those parties that represent, in each case, the most left-wing positions on the ideological spectrum: Adelante Andalucía (Andalusia), En Comú Podem (Catalonia), and Podemos-IU (Castile and Leon).

Figure 7.
Aversive emotions of VOX voters towards far-left parties



Source: own elaboration.

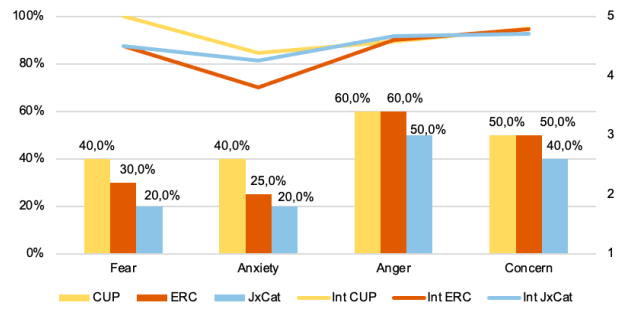
To these general trends we should add two issues that are specific to the Catalan case: first, the significant percentages of negative emotional presence towards right-wing and centre-right parties, especially anger (30% PP, 45% C's) and concern (30% PP, 25% C's); and, secondly, the presence of negative and very negative emotions towards all parties with a pro-independence stance (Figures 8–9). Here we can speak of the existence of an emotional regime of its own, the one established by the procés (Lagares, Máiz and Rivera 2022).

Thus, in the case of anger towards pro-independence parties, the percentages range from 50% for Junts to 60% for ERC or the CUP, while in the case of concern, the values are slightly lower. Although the percentages are similar between parties, the differences are due to the average intensities, which are higher in the case of pro-independence parties (between 4.5 and 5) than in the case of left-wing parties (between 4 and 4.5). The gap that the procés imposed on Catalan society would become a fundamental catalyst for the emotionality of supporters of extreme right.

There is, again, an important presence and intensity of aversive emotions expressed towards these parties compared to towards left-wing parties: that of contempt and, to a lesser extent, resentment, the emotions that capitalize on this aversion. The CUP and ECP are the parties onto which this emotionality is projected to the greatest extent. As with the emotions of anxiety, we observe certain differences in the mean values of intensity, which are higher than those observed for the left-wing parties in this community.

The results presented for the Catalan case allow us to discuss the complexity that characterizes the emotional architecture of extreme right-wing parties in this context. This would be marked by the evolution of the process and, especially, by the events leading up to the holding of these elections, and the dynamics traced by the actors involved.

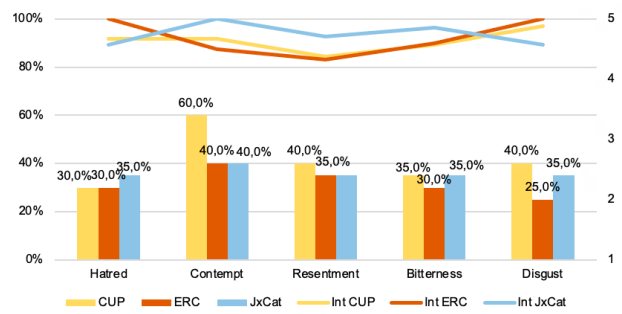
Figure 8.
Negative emotions of VOX voters towards pro-independence parties. Catalonia 2021



Source: own elaboration.

An emotional regime seemed to respond to the polarization built around the procés, although it has never had the same level of intensity among citizens as in the political and media narrative. Lagares, Máiz and Rivera (2022) referring to the Catalan context of 2017, the moment of maximum splendour of the procés, point to the striking tempering of the emotional regime, which they explain by the fact that the negative emotionality of far-right voters pivots on the emotions of anxiety, all of which are common emotions in politics.

Figure 9.
Aversive emotions of VOX voters towards pro-independence parties. Catalonia 2021



Source: own elaboration.

In short, the emotional regime of VOX voters is not unified, and we can differentiate the one established in Andalusia and Castile and Leon from the one shown in Catalonia. In the first two moments, although with different architectures, the regime is unique and is sustained in three dimensions: a) the presence of positive emotions towards the party, especially hope; b) the presence of positive emotions (hope and pride) towards right-wing parties; and c) the presence of negative emotions (concern and anger) and very negative emotions (contempt) towards left-wing and far-left parties. In the case of Catalonia, the regime that builds the procés is unique, adding to the dimensions indicated, the presence of negative emotions (anger and concern) towards the right-wing parties and the presence of negative emotions (anger and

concern) and very negative emotions (contempt and resentment) towards the pro-independence parties. The architecture drawn in this context shows not only different percentages of presence, but especially high levels of emotional intensity, the result of the tension and polarization of the context.

Influence of emotions on the VOX vote

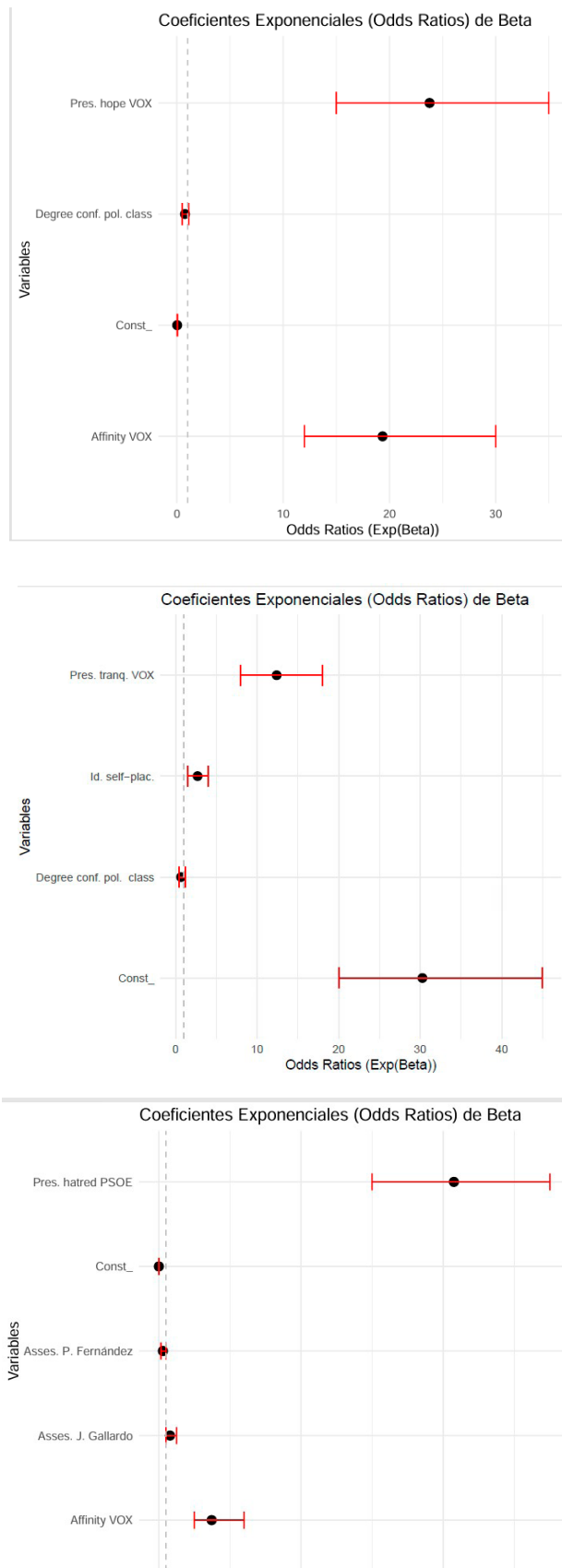
As mentioned previously, in this research we maintain that emotions have a relevant weight in explaining the vote for VOX at these three specific moments. To confirm this assumption, several binary logistic regression models were proposed.¹⁰ They included, in addition to the classic variables in the analysis of voting behavior, the presence of the most relevant emotions in each case. The values of the measures of fit present adequate values and the explanatory levels are relevant (Table 2).¹¹

The results confirm the importance that emotions have, along with other variables, in defining the vote for VOX at each of these three moments, the emotion that is significant being different in each case. While in 2018, in the Andalusian context, hope for VOX becomes the emotional driver of support for this party, demonstrating once again what that moment meant in institutional terms, in the Catalan case, positive emotional expression is present, through tranquility, which is revealed to be fundamental in the face of the independence challenges. In contrast to the relevance for the explanation of positive emotions in these two contexts, in the Castile-Leon case, the explanation pivots on a negative emotion conveyed towards a left-wing party, the PSOE. The hatred expressed towards this party most likely concentrates the differences that separate both parties: an opposition that advanced the descriptive and that seems to have increased among VOX voters in the last two years (Oñate, Pereira and Mo 2022), exemplified largely in the figure of its leader and president of the government, Pedro Sánchez.

Another variable that exerts a notable weight in the voting decision is party identification. In both the Andalusian and Castilian cases, affinity is shown to be the second most important variable in terms of impact on the voting decision, considerably increas-

10 An analysis based on additive logic was proposed that led to the search for the final model by adding different groups of variables.
 11 Initially, a selection of variables was made to test the design of the models, using as a selection criterion the different emotional architectures outlined by the descriptive analysis. The inclusion of all the emotional variables would generate certain estimation problems in the regression, given the disparate response percentages in terms of presence. In each of the three contexts, the emotions that presented the highest levels of presence were included. The final and refined models (only statistically significant variables) are presented after the different tests carried out.

Figure 10.
Coefficient graph (Exp (B)) of the binary logistic regression models. Andalusia, Catalonia and Castile and Leon



Source: own elaboration.

Table 2.
VOX voting models

Covariables	Coeff.	Andalusia	Catalonia	Castile and León
Ideological self-placement	β		0.995*** (0.234)	
Degree of confidence in the Catalan political class	β		-0.392* (0.176)	
Degree of confidence in the Spanish political class	β	-0.278** (0.109)		
Assessment of Juan García-Gallardo	β			0.458** (0.158)
Assessment of Pablo Fernández	β			-0.542** (0.205)
Presence of Hope VOX	β	3.169*** (0.581)		
Presence of Tranquility VOX	β		2.517*** (0.727)	
Presence of Hatred PSOE	β			3.726* (1.509)
Affinity with VOX	β	2.963*** (0.551)		2.007* (0.786)
(Constant)	β	-3.784*** (0.574)	-8.551*** (1.554)	-4.281*** (0.881)
-2 log likelihood		144.881	74.305	55.330
R2 Nagelkerke		59.2%	60.4%	57,8%
N		574	692	208

Significance: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Source: own elaboration.

ing support for VOX (Figure 10). Although the relevance that the affective question has had in the definition of party identification since its beginnings is not unknown (Campbell et al. 1960), the fact is that in each case the specific emotion or emotions that nourish it differ and sometimes even work through their indirect effect on identification or on the direct effect on other variables, such as the vote (Lagares, Pereira and Jaráiz 2022).

Beyond these common elements, the models present differences specific to the circumstances of each context. Thus, in 2018 the explanation of the vote is completed with the presence of a variable revealing what VOX means to its voters: an alternative to the national mainstream forces, exemplified by the significance of the distrust towards the Spanish political class, which increases the probability of support. This distrust is also present in 2021, although in this case it is expressed in the negative effect that the positive assessment of the Catalan political class has on support for VOX. As we have seen, a distinctive element of the emotional construction of far-right voters in Catalonia was the presence of high levels of negative emotional presence towards the pro-independence parties, an issue that would be reflected in the significance of this variable in the model.

In the case of Castile and Leon, regional leadership is revealed as a relevant explanatory variable in two ways: the assessment of the regional leader contributes to increasing the probability of voting, while the

assessment of Podemos' candidate contributes to reducing it. The lack of significance of the leadership in the 2018 and 2021 models may possibly be due to the limited influence that the regional leader would exert in both scenarios. In the case of Andalusia, this would be because it is an initial moment for this party, where the only leadership that would generate traction in the vote would be that of the national leader (Rivera, Castro and Mo 2021).¹² In Catalonia, this was due to the importance of the procés as the axis of VOX's discourse in favour of national unity, which led Santiago Abascal to nationalize this issue and, consequently, to a certain extent, to make the regional electoral competition his own.

Finally, we should point out the effect of ideological self-positioning, present in the Andalusian context, whose presence increases, as might be expected, support for the party as this positioning shifts to the right. In the presence of other cleavages, at this initial moment, the vote is anchored to ideology.

12 Only one of the three studies included Santiago Abascal's assessment, so it was considered appropriate not to include it in the analysis in terms of comparability. However, the presence of this variable, especially in the Andalusian case, significantly influenced the explanation of the vote (Rivera, Castro and Mo 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

This research would confirm the existence of a common emotional regime of extreme right-wing voters in our country, which present specific characteristics in the Catalan case because of the influence exerted by the *procés*. This regime is anchored in four dimensions: the expression of positive emotions towards VOX (mainly hope); the presence of positive emotions towards right-wing and centre-right parties; the presence of negative emotions (anger, concern) towards left-wing parties; and, in the Catalan case, very negative emotions towards pro-independence parties (contempt). However, this regime presents different architectures, visible in the different percentages of presence and the levels of intensity expressed for each emotion, when we look at each political moment.

Hope is one of the emotions that presents architectural differences (presence and intensity) between 2018 and 2022, compared to 2021. In our view one of the main explanatory factors for this would be the expectations of victory in both moments. In this sense, it is important to remember that it is an emotion that would manifest itself when individuals recognize the real possibility of achieving a goal (Reading 2004).

Furthermore, one of the characteristics of the emergence and institutionalization of the far right in our country has been the generation of a polarized climate of opinion, fundamentally structured by discursive semantics—that is semantics that appeals, beyond positive emotionality, to negative emotions of anxiety and aversion that end up generating a notable emotional polarization among citizens, articulated against their main political antagonists, the left-wing parties and the pro-independence parties. This polarization takes on special meaning in the expression of specific emotions, common in politics and in some cases mobilizing action and facilitating voting, such as anger. This emotion is present, with significant percentage values in all three moments; although in 2018 and 2022 it pivots on the left-wing parties, and in 2021 it does so, to a greater extent, on the pro-independence parties. This is an effect to which the expression of concern is added, generating reinforcements between them.

But in contexts of extreme political polarization, such as that which characterizes the Catalan case,¹³ the presence of more intense and aversive emotions is noticeably evident, with greater force than in other contexts, even if they are not the main emotions that one would expect. An aversion that pivots mainly on contempt, an emotion that encompasses the denial of the “other” and the rejection of its ideas and values.

13 Especially when the *procés* has become a central axis and the peculiarity of the explanation of the vote for VOX in Spain (Castro and Jaráiz 2022).

Despite the limitations that any research of these characteristics may imply, it yields important findings that complement those already observed at a national level both before and after the irruption of the extreme right in Spain.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Nieves Lagares Diez: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Methodology, Writing – review & editing.

María Pereira López: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft.

Erika Jaráiz Gulías: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing.

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