THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY THE EXTREME RIGHT IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS:
COMPARING PORTUGAL (*CHEGA; ENOUGH!*) AND SPAIN (*VOX*)

Sara Pina

Assistant Professor of Communication and Political Science, Lusófona University (Lisbon, Portugal)
Press and Social Media Advisor, Portuguese Government (2015-2021)

sara.pina@ulusofona.pt

- Election campaigns' main themes of the Iberian extreme-right parties in social media

- Spain 2019 campaign and Portugal 2022 campaign (last 15 days before elections – 29 jan and 28 April).

- Analysis of both party and leader campaigns: Vox and Santiago Abascal (Spain); Chega and Andre Ventura (Portugal).

- Total text messages (N): 674.

- Three social media outlets: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

- Descriptive quantitative analysis aimed at finding differences and similarities between the two countries

1. Comparison between the 3 main social media: FB; Instagram; Twitter.

2. Distinction between leaders' and parties' social media strategies.

3. Three main dimensions of analysis: 1) Populism (e.g. attacks on the political class); 2) Anti-liberalism (e.g. attacks to fundamental rights); 3) Position in relation to the economy and the welfare state (liberal vs. interventionist)

	VOX			ABASCAL			CHEGA			VENTURA		
	FB	INS	TWI	FB	INS	TWI	FB	INS	TWI	FB	INS	TWI
nationalist appeals	57%	75%	50,5%	84%	80%	67%	52%	67%	75%	56%	67%	27%
Catholicism defense	0	0	0	3%	3%	3%	2%	0	0	1%	0	4%
attack immigrants	4,5%	7%	6%	5%	0	10%	2%	0	0	1%	1%	0
attack political class	14%	3,5%	16%	6%	8,5	6,5	17%	14%	0	9,5%	3%	21%
attack journalists	7%	3,5%	18%	0	3%	2%	2%	2%	0	1%	1%	4%
other attacks*	4,5%	7%	0	0	0	0	2%	0	0	2%	1%	4%
lower taxation	2%	0	1%	0	0	0	7%	3,5%	25%	8,5%	7%	8%
higher salaries, welfare support	0	1%	3,5%	0	0	0	9%	2%	0	2%	1%	9%
corruption	0	3,5%	0	0	0	0	3%	2%	0	9,5%	9%	11,5%
law and order claims	2%	0	1%	0	0	3%	5%	2%	0	4%	0	8%
Catalan autonomy	10%	3,5%	3,5%	1,5%	6%	8%	------	------	------	------	------	------
Support to war veterans	-------	------	------	------	------	------	0	9%	4%	4%	9%	4%

	FB	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	57%	75%	50,5%
ABASCAL	84%	80%	67%
CHEGA	52%	67%	75% = 3POSTS
VENTURA	56%	67%	27%

Nationalist appeals...

... and only in Spain attacks to Catalan autonomy:

	FB	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	10%	3,5%	3,5%
ABASCAL	1,5%	6%	8%

Nationalist appeals

- VOX and Abascal emphasize nationalism messages on their social media; much less so in Chega and Ventura's messages.

- Both leaders show nationalist concerns more than their own parties (especially Abascal).

- Leaders' more active than party in social media (confirming personalization theories)

- Portugal: defense of the old imperialism is relevant, as shown by posts defending war veterans being 4% to 7% of total messages

nationalist appeals message example:

SAN SEBASTIÁN. La #EspañaViva se pone en pie en tierra vasca. En defensa de la unidad de España y de la libertad, la buena gente de Guipúzcoa celebra un gran acto. Sin miedo, a pesar de las amenazas y violencia de los proetarras del exterior #PorEspaña #VOX

nationalist appeals message example

Hoje é um dos dias mais emocionantes da minha vida política. Estamos num grande almoço de ex - combatentes do Ultramar e ofereceram-me o uniforme. Orgulho! O CHEGA estará ao vosso lado!

	FB	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	0	0	0
ABASCAL	3%	3%	3%
CHEGA	2%	0	0
VENTURA	1%	0	4%

Catholicism defense

• Not so mobilizing. The Iberians are increasingly secularized.

•All the messages in Abascal pages were about the fire and reconstruction of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

• The Portuguese extreme right created religious posts for no special contextual reason.

• Both parties assume themselves as Catholics but that is not a main topic of differentiation from the mainstream right wing.

	FB	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	4,5%	7%	6%
ABASCAL	5%	0	10%
CHEGA	2%	0	0
VENTURA	1%	1%	0

Attacks on immigrants

• Spain has had much more immigration from North Africa and the Middle East than Portugal.

• Immigration in Portugal comes mainly from Portuguese speaking countries like Brazil, Angola, etc.

• Portugal is not in the refugees' fleeing route. Portugal did not have terrorist attacks like Spain (Atocha).

	FB	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	14%	3,5%	16%
ABASCAL	6%	8,5%	6,5%
CHEGA	17%	14%	0
VENTURA	9,5%	3%	21%

Attacks on political class

• high relevance of messages criticizing and even insulting mainstream politicians and parties. Typical message of populist parties against established political elites.

	FB	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	7%	3,5%	18%
ABASCAL	6%	8,5%	6,5%
CHEGA	17%	14%	0
VENTURA	9,5%	3%	21%

Attacks on journalists

• **Attacks on civic freedoms/fundamental rights – freedom of the press.**

	FB	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	4,5%	7%	0
ABASCAL	0	0	0
CHEGA	2%	0	0
VENTURA	2%	1%	4%

Attacks on other groups

• Portuguese Chega and it's leader Ventura main target are the Roma people.

• In Spain mainly attacks against feminists, what Vox calls the «feminist lobby that doesn't represent Spanish women». Abascal did not spread this message.

• Vox's social media are usually more aggressive and have more "hate speech" than its leader Abascal.

	SUBJECTS	FB	INSTA	TWITTER
VOX	LOWER TAXATION	2%	0	1%
	MORE WELFARE	0	1%	3,5%
ABASCAL	LOWER TAXATION	0	0	0
	MORE WELFARE	0	0	0
CHEGA	LOWER TAXATION	7%	3,5%	25%
	MORE WELFARE	0	2%	0
VENTURA	LOWER TAXATION	8,5%	7%	8%
	MORE WELFARE	2%	1%	9%

Economy

• Chega and its leader are more liberal: defense of lower taxation. This can be explained with the fact that it emerged during the tenure of a Government based on an agreement between the socialists and the radical left (PS, BE and PCP).

• But this position looks incongruent with the defense of higher welfare support. Undefined positioning for economic politics. Chega also argues that widespread corruption justifies their claim that the public money is badly invested.

• Economy was not an important theme in the campaigning of Vox and Abascal. Spanish main parties are already liberal economically.

	FB	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	0	3,5%	0
ABASCAL	0	0	0
CHEGA	3%	2%	0
VENTURA	9,5%	9%	11,5%

Corruption claims

• In Portugal the perception of corruption is high and that is a theme used by Chega and Ventura to attack politicians and "the system".

• Surprisingly there are almost no mentions in the Spanish campaign.

	FB	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	2%	0	1%
ABASCAL	0	0	3%
CHEGA	5%	2%	0
VENTURA	4%	0	8%

Law and order

• Differences between popular radical right parties is not so notorious when defending law enforcement agents and strong measures on crime. This type of claims is stronger in the Portuguese social media (support base in the sectors of the police?).

Final comments

- Main messages around nationalism. In the future it would be interesting to investigate in detail this messages, by creating specific categories.

- A study of the differences between each social medium is also in process.