CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Organizational Institutionalization in Electoral Sustainability. A Comparative Analysis of the Spanish Far Right: Fuerza Nueva and VOX

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Abstract

This article focuses on the most relevant far right parties since the restoration of democracy in Spain, namely, Fuerza Nueva and VOX. These two parties show divergent electoral trajectories. While the former had some ephemeral prominence during the democratic process of transition, the latter emerged in 2018 and, for the time being, seems to have become established in several political arenas. Through an in-depth qualitative examination, this research explores the role of the organizational institutionalization process in the divergent electoral sustainability of both parties. The results show that it is possible to identify a temporal link, as well as certain mechanisms, between the way in which the parties develop organizationally and their electoral sustainability. In other words, a solid organizational institutionalization process has a positive effect on electoral sustainability. Overall, these findings suggest the need to further strengthen the so-called "internalist perspective" in the agenda of the far right, which entails a more systematic view of the characteristics of the parties themselves to explain their performance.

Keywords: far right; Spain; organizational institutionalization; electoral sustainability

Introduction: the uneven evolution of the far right in Spain

Since the 1980s, the far right party family has been growing in influence in many European countries. However, some countries have not followed this trend (at least not until more recently), namely, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, or Luxemburg. In particular, Spain has a striking absence of any relevant far right party at the national level despite the presence of favorable circumstances such as unemployment, political discontent, high levels of immigration, etc. (Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015; González-Enríquez 2017). These conditions, according to the "externalist

perspective," should have led to the rise of the far right. The fact that these parties did not appear, at least for a long period of time, steered the rise of the academic and political paradigm termed "Spanish exceptionalism" (Ortiz et al. 2020), according to which, Spain is immune and refractory to the far right phenomenon. Some plausible explanations have been offered to understand the irrelevance of the far right party family in Spain, including the inability to innovate ideologically beyond neo-Francoist ideas and to emulate the successful European model of the populist radical right (Casals 2009), the nonexistence of charismatic leaders and organizational atomization (Rodríguez 1992) or the hegemonic role of the center-right bloc in the country (Llamazares and Ramiro 2006).

The long period of absence of far right parties in the Spanish political arena is undoubtedly clear. However, there is a political experience in contemporary Spanish history almost always overlooked, and that requires further examination. We refer to Fuerza Nueva (FN, hereafter), the far right party led by Blas Piñar, which won parliamentary representation in 1979 (see "Explaining the different electoral sustainability of FN and VOX"for a detailed recollection and see Table A1). FN played a significant role during the years of the democratic transition process, showing high levels of political mobilization and being able to achieve significant support. Nevertheless, the party collapsed in 1982, only a few years after winning parliamentary representation.

More recently, the surge of VOX has completely debunked the so-called "Spanish exceptionalism" and has ended decades of political marginality of the far right. In less than a year, from December 2018 to November 2019, VOX was able to become established in local, regional, national, and European arenas (see Table A2). Most notable is the role of the party in the national parliament, where it becomes the third strongest political force with 52 seats in the legislature after the November 2019 election. Furthermore, since February 2022, VOX has formed part of the regional coalition government in Castilla y León (alongside Partido Popular (PP)[1]). VOX has been able to introduce typical far right issues into the political agenda and alter other parties' strategies (García et al. 2020).

To summarize, the evolution of the Spanish far right has been marked by political and electoral irrelevance during the decades after the Francoist dictatorship. The only two far right parties that have ever won representation at the national level in the democratic regime are FN and VOX. Previous research about the ideological principles or the electoral constituency of the two parties has been conducted (Ballester 2021; Gould 2019; Ramis-Moyano et al. 2023). However, we believe there is at least one aspect that has not been studied sufficiently, namely, organizational institutionalization. We hypothesize that the organizational institutionalization process plays a key role in the explanation of the divergent electoral trajectories of FN and VOX (obviously, other historical factors not considered in this study may also play a role). Thus, it is expected that the poor, difficult, and conflictive institutionalization of FN after its breakthrough affected its short electoral persistence. In contrast, we expect that the way in which VOX has carried out its institutionalization process has benefited its subsequent electoral sustainability.

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[1]Historically, PP is the hegemonic centre-right party in Spain, having been in the national government on numerous times.

Our goal is not to provide a complete causal explanation of the electoral performance of these parties but rather to explore whether a temporal link and a logical mechanism exist between their different institutionalization processes and divergent trajectories.

This article is structured as follows. First, we present a theoretical review of the broader literature on far right parties, which has been dominated by the so-called "externalist perspective." Considering the limitations of this viewpoint, we suggest following a party-centric approach (termed the "internalist perspective") to understand the complex reality of far right politics. Specifically, we highlight the importance of considering the impact of organizational institutionalization on the electoral sustainability of far right parties. Next, after explaining our research design, we develop an empirically based analysis. Finally, we conclude by summarizing the implications of our findings for the general agenda of far right parties and point out possible avenues for future research.

Party-centric approach in the study of far right parties

This section provides an overview of the general research agenda on far right parties, which has been traditionally dominated by the so-called "externalist perspective," highlighting some of its constraints and suggesting several developments to improving an alternative "internalist perspective" (i.e., party-centric), with special attention given to organizational issues.

Since the late 1980s, the emergence of far right parties in several European party systems has been accompanied by increasing academic interest. As such, this party family has received much more attention than others, even when its real level of participation in government has been limited (Mudde 2016). In general, following the findings of Mudde (2010, 2007), academic research has focused on disentangling the puzzle of far right parties by assuming their presence as an anomalous phenomenon that can only be explained by extreme circumstances. This view clearly echoes, and occasionally explicitly reproduces, the fundamentals of a large part of the literature about historical fascism in the interwar period, as was highlighted by Art (2013). However, modern far right parties seem not to be extraneous actors in democracy but rather a reflection of inherent tensions with regard to central issues such as identity, political representation or immigration (Mudde 2010). Moreover, analogies to historical fascism do not seem to be accurate, especially when considering the notable differences between the interwar period and the current European panorama in aspects such as the nature of political competition, social structure, or the strength of the rule of law (Art 2013).[2]

The hegemonic "externalist approach" is rooted in the general idea that the far right's breakthroughs are the direct consequence of economic, political, or social crisis (Betz and Immerfall 1998). One of the cyclical reconceptualization of this approach is the so-called "globalization losers" hypothesis, namely, far right politics are understood as the alienated reaction of resentment by those who have seen their

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[2]We do not deny that a historical link exists between Fascism and modern far right expressions (see Copsey (2018)). What we suggest is to be cautious in applying the same explanatory schemes for these phenomena, since their differences are more notable than their similarities.

status and position in society lowered because of modernization and capitalist globalization (Rydgren 2007). Bell perfectly summarizes this approach by describing far right politics as: "the politics of frustration, the sour impotence of those who find themselves unable to understand, let alone command, the complex mass society that is the polity today" (2002: 42).With respect to the hegemonic approach regarding far right parties, it is possible to identify what Goodwin (2006) denotes as the "externalist bias," which consists of excessive attention to demand-side factors. The emphasis on demographic, socioeconomic, or attitudinal factors can ultimately be interpreted as a proof of the dominance of structure over agency in the social sciences in recent decades (Eatwell 2003). An extreme reading of this "externalist perspective" leads to focus primarily on voters, rather than on parties themselves, when studying the key question of their electoral performance. Undoubtedly, demographic, socioeconomic, and attitudinal factors help us to understand the phenomenon, thereby elucidating what social forces and trends are behind the rise of far right parties. Nevertheless, demand-side explanations are only a part of the puzzle, as they fail to disentangle the key question regarding far right parties when considered as a whole, namely, the variability in their electoral performance both at the geographical and the temporal level. For some time, numerous studies have pointed out that traditional demand-side explanations cannot account for variations in the electoral success of far right parties across countries or regions (Art 2011; Arzheimer 2009; Norris 2005).

Due to the limitations of the "externalist perspective," there is a growing consensus on the need to combine variables on the demand side and on the supply side to achieve more detailed, systematic, and comprehensive explanations (Carter 2005; Mudde 2007). Despite calls to use both approaches, the role of supply-side factors – those that refer to the parties themselves and their political environment (Rydgren 2007) – is still less relevant than that of demand-side factors. In line with this, we consider that an "internalist perspective" would enrich the field, showing that parties are not the "hapless victims of their economic or demographic environment, but as the active shapers of their own fates" (Berman, 1997: 102). Instead, accepting that far right parties have room to maneuver and, ultimately, that agency also matters (Eatwell 2003), it is necessary to put parties "at the center of research on the phenomenon" (Mudde, 2007: 295).

Within the "internalist perspective," a specific research trend – which is still underdeveloped even though formidable advances have been carried out in recent years – has pointed out the importance for far right parties of building strong and efficient organizations to achieve electoral stability and persistence (Art 2011; Carter 2005; Ellinas 2020; Mudde 2007). In general terms, there is an enormous lacuna in the knowledge of far right parties' organizational dimension when we compare it to other aspects such as voter orientation or party ideology. Notwithstanding, far right parties seem to be quite similar in their organizational configuration, being mainly centralist and hierarchized organizations. Following de Lange and Art (2011), we suggest that the key factor to consider is the way a party becomes an institutionalized organization instead of considering just the organization *per se*. According to Gunther and Hopkin, organizational institutionalization can be defined as "the process by which an organization, from being a means to an end, becomes an end in itself" (2002: 196). In the same vein, in his highly influential study, Janda conceives of an institutionalized party as "one that is reified in the

public mind so that "the party" exists as a social organization apart from its momentary leaders, and this organization demonstrates recurring patterns of behavior valued by those who identify with it" (1980: 19). Two different dimensions of organizational institutionalization are distinguished: the external dimension refers to the degree of autonomy a party has regarding the sociopolitical landscape (society and other institutions, mainstream political parties among them),[3] while the internal dimension is related to the interdependence of the different parts of the organization itself and to the routinization of its behavior (de Lange and Art, 2011; Janda, 1980; Randall and Svåsand 2002).

However, how does organizational institutionalization specifically affect electoral performance? Certainly, by the time far right parties obtain their first considerable electoral success, their organizations are usually poorly institutionalized. In those moments, far right parties take advantage of issues' ownership (taking credibility on specific policy issues disregarded by mainstream parties) or favorable opportunity structure (de Lange and Art 2011; Mudde 2007). However, achieving sustainability and persistence after initial breakthrough is a different and more difficult challenge for which parties need to have strong leadership, develop efficient organizational mechanisms to manage dissent, recruit competent and credible candidates, and personnel and establish consistency around all the territory (i.e., develop organizational institutionalization), among other things. When parties develop consistent organizational structures and establish themselves across the national territory, it is more likely that voters will give them credibility in subsequent elections and conceive of them as eligible options. In contrast, when parties are perceived as chaotic, disorganized, or incoherent, it is less likely that they will continue receiving support. For this reason, organizational institutionalization plays a key role in mid- and long-term party stabilization in the electoral arena (Art 2008).

Obviously, the impact of party organizational institutionalization is not deterministic. The literature has highlighted other factors that may impact the electoral sustainability of political parties. First, ideology is a feature of parties that can clearly constrain their electoral fate. In the case of far right parties, previous findings have shown how extremist parties are more unsuccessful than more moderate parties (Carter 2005). The link is quite clear: there are more sectors of society attracted to a soft version of far right ideology. Moreover, the way in which parties are born is important because the structural conditions of their formation have important implications for their subsequent electoral sustainability, thereby providing them with different resources and capital. According to Bolleyer, rooted parties (supported by a societal group that had at least a rudimentary organizational infrastructure, including voluntary members or affiliates contributing to the organization's maintenance) are more likely to gain electoral sustainability than entrepreneurial parties (developed by individuals with no previous links with other organizations) (2013: 40). Furthermore, Hug (2001) proposes the concept of "organizational newness" and categorizes parties as new if they are either built from

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[3]Within this external dimension, a clear sign of institutionalization is the ability to alter other parties' strategies. This has been extensively examined in the case of far right (and challengers) parties. Thus, different strategies of the mainstream parties have been identified regarding the emergence of the far right: from ignoring them to co-opt its discourse (Meguid 2005; van Spanje 2010; van Spanje and de Graaf 2018).

scratch or if they originate from minor splits of established parties. Additionally, the "mode of party formation" (top-down, i.e., by the promotion of a small elite group, or bottom-up, i.e., by the integration of small local organizational units) can also affect the sustainability of the party. Although empirical evidence tends to support the idea of the positive effect of organizational institutionalization on electoral sustainability (Bolleyer 2013; Carter 2005; Janda 1980), all these other factors and their associated explanations need to be considered alternative explanations. Since organizational institutionalization and electoral sustainability seem to be intertwined, we need to examine how institutionalization (as an independent variable) may lead to electoral sustainability (as a dependent variable), while controlling for other factors. As shown in the following section, we proceed by using the so-called "most-similar systems design" (Przeworski and Teune 1970) comparing the case of FN and VOX.

Research design

In this paper, we examine two Spanish far right parties: FN and VOX. Our research is a comparative case study, the goal of which is to achieve a typical "thick description" of case studies through a comparative focus to discover contrasts, similarities, and patterns between the cases (Geertz 1973). According to George, who profusely theorized about "process tracing," this comparative approach is: "focused because it deals selectively with only certain aspects of the historical case and structured because it employs general questions to guide the data collection analysis in that historical case" (1979: 61–2). Specifically, we employ the so-called "most-similar systems design," which is based on Mill's "method of difference" and consists of examining cases that are as similar as possible except on the outcome of interest (Kaarbo and Beasley 1999; Przeworski and Teune 1970). With such a selection of cases, if one factor is different between the cases, it is the probable cause of the different outcomes (Anckar 2008; Seawright and Gerring 2008).[4]

Therefore, regarding the outcome of interest, or the dependent variable, "electoral sustainability" is conceptualized as the ability of a party to maintain its support after its first electoral breakthrough (see Table 2). Following Bolleyer (2013), we operationalize this variable by examining the number of seats in the national parliament. In this way, a party is qualified as sustainable if it achieves representation at least once after its first electoral breakthrough.[5] In our case studies, FN is a paradigmatic example of an unsustainable party, in contrast to VOX (characterized as sustainable).

As shown in Table 1, among different explanatory factors, we will argue that both parties are very similar except in their "organizational institutionalization," as previously reviewed. Therefore, we proceed to examine the extent to which the differences in FN and VOX institutionalization may explain their different sustainability in electoral terms.

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[4]Anyway, the authors recognize that there is a huge debate about the validity of Mill's method for finding causal explanations. For example, the works of Lieberson (1994) and Ghalehdar (2022) offer an excellent overview of the pitfalls and weaknesses of this approach.

[5]In our opinion, focusing on parliamentary representation is a better option than considering the percentage of votes, since the first measure is stable and objective while the second can change depending on institutional context (i.e., a certain percentage of votes is not always translated into the same level of representation and influence as a result of the competitive dynamics and the mechanic effects of the electoral system.

Table 1. Nonvariant explanatory factors for the electoral sustainability of FN and VOX

Ideology	Both are far right parties. They show ideological principles such as authoritarianism, nativism, ethnocultural nationalism, or traditionalism, amongst others
Organizational newness	Both can be considered as new parties: FN was built from scratch, while VOX originated from a minor split of mainstream center-right (PP)
Party origin	Both parties were created as "rooted parties," that it is: having links to already-existing societal groups at the time of their foundation
Mode of party formation	Both parties were promoted by a small elite group in a top-down way

Notes: Own elaboration based on Bolleyer (2013), Bolleyer and Bytzek (2013) and Janda (1980).

The external and internal dimensions of organizational institutionalization are operationalized as follows. The external dimension considers the perceptions and reactions of the rest of parties; the internal considers, on the one hand, the internal leadership dynamics and, on the other, the dynamics of recruitment, training, and socialization of activists and elites. Table 2 includes de detailed protocol of observation, including the leading questions to obtain relevant information on each dimension.

To trace the institutionalization processes of the two far right parties under study and their impacts on electoral sustainability, we rely on data from different sources. First, there is scarce but rich academic literature on the Spanish far right tradition, which is primarily historiographic in its orientation. Additionally, we collect official data from the parties themselves (manifestos, internal documents, leader speeches, etc.), media sources, and the testimony of some individuals who have been involved in the institutionalization of both parties. Although this research uses mainly secondary data to compare two parties that have been previously studied, its added value consists of illuminating aspects that have seldom been addressed.

Furthermore, data triangulation using different sources allows us to conduct our analysis with greater accuracy. We perform a qualitative in-depth examination of the gathered data to obtain answers to our questions in Table 2 and thus advance explanation building. The explanation building consists of an iterative narrative process focused on shedding light on causal links (Yin 2009: 219); in other words, it consists of *how* and *why* organizational institutionalization processes can explain the differential electoral trajectories of far right parties. Assessing organizational issues has the implicit risk of reaching circular explanations. Certainly, institutionalization processes can benefit electoral performance; however, at the same time, the electoral success can strengthen a party's organization. To avoid these tautological findings and effectively discern the effect of institutionalization on electoral sustainability, it is necessary to determine the direction of causality and carefully trace party development over time (Ellinas 2009; Janda and Colman 1998). To reduce the risk of incurring the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy, the development of the results consists predominantly of highlighting mechanisms, in addition to the temporal order, by which organizational institutionalization can affect electoral sustainability.

Table 2. Operationalization and observation protocol for dependent and independent variables

Theoretical concept	Empirical aspects to examine (observation protocol)	Positive observation
Electoral sustainability	Does the party retain any seats in the national parliament after its first breakthrough?	The party can be qualified as sustainable if it is able to achieve representation at least once after its first breakthrough at the national level.
Organizational institutionalization	**External dimension** Do other political actors alter their behavior because of the party's presence in the political system? What kind of strategies do the other parties adopt in the face of the far right party's breakthrough? In what way do other actors change their strategies? What kind of relationships are established between the mainstream parties and the far right party? Do the mainstream parties recognize the far right as a valid interlocutor?	The party can be considered institutionalized in its external dimension if it is able to change other parties' strategies (for example, when they respond with "accommodative strategy," which consists in copying its ideological discourse), to create collaborative links with mainstream actors or to become part of coalition government.
	Internal dimension *Internal leadership dynamics:* How is the party elite organized? Can the party leadership transmit a consistent organizational and ideological message to the militants? *Dynamics of recruitment, training, and socialization:* Can the party elite discipline the organization efficiently? What profile of militants can the party attract? Does the party have mechanisms to train party cadres and elites? Does the party have a professional staff? Has the party considerable presence in different regions, and is well established through Spain?	The party can be considered institutionalized in its internal dimension if the leadership is able to create a consistent organizational structure, neutralizing internal tensions and transmitting coherent ideological messages. Also, the party can be considered institutionalized in this sphere if it attracts moderate, educated, and competent activists. That is, larger proportion of moderates in relation to extremists (see the classification of far right activists proposed by Art (2011: 32–3)). Moreover, the party offers to the militants and cadres ideological training. Finally, an institutionalized party has professional staff for bureaucratic work and is distributed throughout the territory.

Notes: Own elaboration based on Bolleyer (2013), Bolleyer and Bytzek (2013) and Janda (1980).

Explaining the different electoral sustainability of FN and VOX

Tables 3 and 4 show the different electoral trajectories of FN (our case for the electoral unsustainable party) and VOX (our case for the electoral sustainable party) at the national level. As can be observed, while FN did not manage to achieve

Table 3. FN's results in national elections (1977–1982)

Elections	Votes	% Votes	Seats
National elections (June 1977)[6]	67,336	0.37	0
National elections (March 1979)[7]	378,964	2.11	1
National elections (October 1982)	108,746	0.52	0

Notes: Own compilation based on data of the Ministry for Home Affairs (2020).

Table 4. VOX's results in national elections (2014–2019)

Elections	Votes	% Votes	Seats
National elections (December 2015)	58,114	0.23	0
National elections (June 2016)	47,182	0.2	0
National elections (April 2019)	2,677173	10.25	24
National elections (November 2019)	3,639,772	15.09	52

Notes: Own compilation based on data of the Ministry for Home Affairs (2020).

representation at least once after its initial breakthrough, VOX did. Furthermore, Tables A1 and A2 in the appendix show the evolution of both parties in all electoral arenas.

As explained before (see Table 1), our design relies on demonstrating that other factors – alternative explanations for the effect of the organizational institutionalization of parties on their electoral sustainability – are similar in our two case studies, and therefore cannot account for the variance in the outcome. Thus, some of these main alternative explanations can be ruled out; notwithstanding, caution should be used considering the implicit difficulty of controlling for all the variables in the social sciences. The same is applied to other possible factors that could affect organizational institutionalization (for example, the historical context) (Lieberson 1994; Ghalehdar 2022). Although further details are found below in the contextualization of our cases, we summarize here our main arguments regarding similarities in ideology, organizational newness, party origin, and mode of party formation.

First, FN and VOX are clearly categorized as part of the far right party family.[8] Thus, both parties show an ideological core marked by authoritarianism, Spanish

[6]FN concurred together with Falange Española de las JONS (FE-JONS) in the coalition Alianza Nacional 18 de Julio (AN18) in 16 provinces. In other 9 provinces, both FN and FE-JONS contested alone.

[7]FN concurred together with Falange Española de las JONS (FE-JONS), Círculos Doctrinales José Antonio, Comunión Tradicionalista, Asociación de Jóvenes Tradicionalistas y Confederación Nacional de Excombatientes in the coalition Unión Nacional (UN).

[8]We are aware that within the far-right party family, it is possible to make a distinction between two tendencies: the radical right and the extreme right. Following Mudde: "the radical right is (nominally) democratic, even if they oppose some fundamental values of liberal democracy, whereas the extreme right is in essence antidemocratic, opposing the fundamental principle of sovereignty of the people" (2007: 31). In this sense, it would be possible to conceived FN as an extreme right party and VOX as a radical right party.

ultranationalism (an essentialist, historicist view whose cornerstone is the idea of "national unity"), or the defense of traditional values linked to the Catholic cultural matrix (Llamazares and Ramiro 2006; Ortiz 2019; Rodríguez 1992).[9] In this respect, it is possible to identify in the two cases under study common ideological features of the Spanish far right tradition that are primarily connected with contextual historical issues (e.g., the relationship between the Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship past or the territorial model of the state). In sum, FN and VOX's ideological proposals are similar, even though idiosyncratic particularities exist.

Second, both FN and VOX may be considered new parties (i.e., they were built from scratch or if they originated from minor splits of established parties). In this sense, while FN was legally born in 1977 in the first moments of the new democratic regime, VOX was born as a minor split from the PP in 2013. Moreover, both FN and VOX are rooted parties, following the definition proposed by Bolleyer (2013) and having similar organizational initiations. Whereas FN capitalized on Francoist civil society, VOX took advantage of several organizations connected with the conservative ideological sphere (Fundación para la Defensa de la Nación Española (DENAES) and Fundación Gustavo Bueno, amongst others). Similarly, regarding the "mode of party formation," both FN and VOX were initially promoted by a small elite group rather than by the integration of small local organizational units (Barrio et al. 2021). From this point of view, we can conceptualize the two parties as top-down formations.

In sum, both parties are very similar in the abovementioned dimensions. Hence, the alternative explanations can be to some extent discarded; i.e., as these factors are similar for both parties, we can control our independent variable (organizational institutionalization) *ceteris paribus*. Therefore, we proceed to examine organizational institutionalization in both parties.

When enthusiasm without institutionalization does not lead to electoral sustainability: Fuerza Nueva

Before going deeper into discussing the object under study, it seems necessary to briefly review the origins of FN. In the early 1960s, the increasing economic and political openness carried out by the Francoist dictatorship in Spain alerted the more fundamentalist and radicalized sectors of the regime. The so-called "bunker" was a set of political, economic, military, and religious groups that opposed the liberalization process and aimed at recovering the primitive values of Francoism (Rodríguez 1994: 168). In this landscape, a group of prominent figures of the regime,

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Particularly, the relationship between FN and the democratic framework is ambiguous; the party even praised the Francoist dictatorship, but it nevertheless accepted (at least officially) the democratic rules. Despite this fact, we prefer to use the maximalist category of far-right party family because the ideological similarities between both parties are stronger than their differences.

[9]Anti-immigration orientations are not central for either party. In the case of FN, the presence of these ideas is minimal (Carter 2005; Rodríguez 1992). VOX shows anti-immigration ideas, but they occupy a secondary role in its ideological proposal (Ortiz and Ramos-González 2021; Ramos-González and Ortiz 2022).

under the leadership of Blas Piñar – a notary and "procurador"[10] in the Parliament – promoted a project to enforce these strong ideas (Piñar 2000). This is how the publishing house *Fuerza Nueva*, created in 1966 with the main objective of spreading the principles of the Movement 18th July[11] was born (Torres 2001). The publishing house created a homonymous weekly journal that received substantial attention and served as a mobilizing channel to the "bunker" (Rodríguez 1992). The journal finished publishing in 2017, after six decades of promoting far right statements and a melancholic exaltation of the Francoist regime.

During the late 1960s, the publishing house developed and became one of the most critical voices against the liberalization of the dictatorship, which was already showing signs of fatigue. Indeed, *Fuerza Nueva* became established around Spain, creating a network of related organizations. In this sense, *Fuerza Nueva* truly behaved as a political party, instead of a publishing house, in a moment when parties were obviously banned; it had a youth section (Fuerza Joven), regional delegations, and special groups to carry out political propaganda (the so-called *Grupos de Acción Política*) (Torres 2001: 54). Finally, the publishing house officially became a political association in 1976 (one year after Franco's death) as a step prior to its constitution as a political party a few months later in 1977 thanks to *Ley para la Reforma Política*. In its programmatic statement, FN pointed out the "the fidelity to the memory and the work of Francisco Franco", as well as to the "representative, social, traditional and catholic monarchy" (1976: 2). In ideological terms, FN basically represents a radical Spanish nationalism rooted in fundamentalist, orthodox Catholicism (Casals 1998; Llamazares 2012; Rodríguez 1992).

As noted previously, as a publishing house, FN had built an extensive organizational network with related pro-Francoist associations even before its transformation into a party. Thus, as party, FN seems to have faced the first democratic elections in relatively favorable organizational conditions (at least more favorable than many of the rest of parties, which were hastily organized after decades of being banned). Nevertheless, the first milestone of the party's problematic organizational institutionalization occurred during the first National Congress held in December 1976 (Arriba 1976). As pointed out by Ernesto Milá[12] – an eminent militant of the Spanish far right who was part of FN – the congress was a simple meeting of 40 provincial delegates, which means that there was no political or organizational debate (Milá 2012). In fact, during the congress, the two "souls" of the party started to become explicit. On the one hand, a

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[10]The members of the pseudo democratic Francoist Parliament were called "procuradores." They were directly chosen by the dictatorship.

[11]This date corresponds to the moment when part of the army led by Franco staged the coup d'etat in 1936 against the republican regime. This marked the beginning of the Spanish civil war and then, in 1939, the start of the Francoist dictatorship. Thus, the 18th is a symbolic date for the dictatorship.

[12]Milá is an historical far right militant in Spain who had played a key role in several political projects: FN, Frente Nacional de la Juventud, Frente de la Juventud, Juntas Españolas, Democracia Nacional, España 2000, amongst others. Its extensive contacts with other European radical right organizations (Avanguardia Nazionale, Ordine Nuovo or Parti des Forces Nouvelles) gave him a broader ideological and organizational view. Milá's speech, in the 1976 national congress, highlighted the necessity of build a strong, coordinated organization. Probably, this speech is one of the most systematized reflections about the organizational issue within the Spanish far right in its recent history. It should be noted that Milá was expelled from FN for marrying outside the Catholic church, which was opposed to the national catholic doctrine of the party.

minority stream of opinions led by Milá favored building a modern party (i.e., a mass party that was strongly structured, with organized political cadres and presence in all territories); on the other hand, the original vision defended by the party elite claimed that there was no need for any sophisticated structure or strategy because the charisma of Piñar sufficed (Colectivo Flamel 1985). Finally, the ideas of the elite prevailed and the party faced the first democratic elections without even holding a formal program. Its results were disappointing (see Table 3), even when the party had previously held massive rallies in June in Madrid with almost 30,000 attendees (Fuerza Nueva 18 junio 1977). Casals has synthesized this paradoxical situation with the following eloquent statement: "the applauses for FN, the votes for AP" (1998: 48).

Despite the party's failure in the 1977 elections, there was no self-criticism. Two years later, FN concurred with other far right groups[13] in the alliance Unión Nacional (UN) obtaining one seat in parliament and considerable support in the 1979 national elections (see Table 3). The electoral breakthrough entailed an economic injection from the new affiliations but at the same time made the party's organizational weaknesses even more apparent, especially since the party had to face an accelerated process of construction. After its electoral breakthrough in 1979, FN performed poorly in several regional and local elections (see Table A1). The lack of a solid organizational structure, the massive desertions of militants, and the absence of an electoral logic hobbled the party. FN faced the 1982 national elections affected by this problematic institutionalization process. The attempted coup d'état led by military sectors in 1981 also negatively influenced FN, although the party did not participate directly in the coup itself (Rodríguez 1991). The party's results in the 1982 national elections were disappointing, as FN lost three-quarters of its support compared to 1979. Finally, Piñar unilaterally decided to dismantle the party in November 1982, aided by a great deal of opposition activism. Four years later, Piñar unsuccessfully tried to relaunch the project under the name Front National.

When paying deeper attention to the external and internal dimensions of party organizational institutionalization, we find important weaknesses in both dimensions connected to FN electoral sustainability.

Strengths and weaknesses in FN organizational institutionalization

Focusing, first, on the external dimension of the institutionalization process, things were not propitious for FN. Essentially, the party had a negative reputation in Spanish society because of its aggressive discourse and its ambiguous relationship with violence. In this sense, as noted by Casals "FN offered an image of 'party of disorder', more than a 'party of order'" (Casals 2017). In this sense, the party did not develop modern electoral strategies to expand its electoral base but only focused on those who were already convinced of the party's policies. This was largely a consequence of the absence of efficient organizational machinery. At the same time, FN was perceived as a noncoalitionable party by the rest of the parties. In particular, the role of conservative Alianza Popular (AP)[14] and Unión de Centro Democrático

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[13]FE de la JONS, Círculos Doctrinales José Antonio, Confederación Nacional de Ex Combatientes and Agrupación de Juventudes Tradicionalistas.

[14]AP was re-founded in 1989, thus creating the actual mainstream centre-right Partido Popular (PP).

(UCD)[15] was clear in this respect by ignoring FN and trying to capture the so-called "sociological Francoism" (Del Río 2013). The social democratic Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) also opted to ignore the far-right party.

The analysis of the internal dimension considers both the internal leadership dynamics, and the dynamics of recruitment, training, and socialization of militants and elites. Regarding leadership, FN had a strong presidential structure around the figure of Piñar: all important decisions were made by him and his close collaborators in an authoritarian way (Rodríguez 1992: 690). Hence, Piñar was the absolute leader in the absence of other relevant and charismatic figures. The extremely hierarchized structure of FN is in line with far right parties (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016). What is specific to the case of FN is its leader's absence of leadership skills: he was an excellent orator, but he was not able to develop a coherent organization or unify the different trends of his party in the same way that Le Pen achieved as leader of the Front National in France (Carter 2005; Casals 2005). Likewise, the party did not have second-level leaders capable of acting as "party builders," however, these individuals were directly elected because they were friends or relatives of Piñar.

In the field of recruitment, training, and socialization of militants and elites, FN was able to attract a large number of activists,[16] but with strikingly different profiles (Rodríguez 1992: 708). On the one hand, there was a group over 55 years of age from the military establishment and the Francoist state administration; on the other, there was a large group under the age of 25. Thus, FN's militant base showed a "U" form, with a great lacuna in the ages between 30 and 50, i.e., the most important age bracket for building a strong organization.[17]

Even with its considerable base of militants, FN never developed routinized mechanisms to solve internal problems or trained its cadres as professional staff. Amateurism prevailed and the administrative tasks were conducted voluntarily by the militants themselves in their free time. Furthermore, due to the absence of party discipline, there was an unsolvable tension between the elite (represented by the old generational group) and the young sectors grouped in the young Fuerza Joven sector. The first group aimed to participate in the democratic system in a similar way to the Italian MSI, while the latter group wanted to develop an "antisystem party" with continuous street mobilization and actions in the borders of the democratic framework (Casals 2000). As a result of the disagreement between these two souls, the party had a diffuse, ambiguous strategy. During its existence, FN had an ambiguous relationship with violence. Although the party officially condemned violence, it was also true that several of its militants were involved in riots and violent actions[18] (Jabardo 1996). As consequence of this tension, a large portion of the radical young sector, which was disillusioned with the elites and wanted more

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[15]UCD was the main conservative party during the Spanish democratic transition process, being twice in office (from 1977 to 1982).

[16]At the time of its dissolution in 1982, the party had approximately 50,000 members (Torres 2001: 65).

[17]The role of women in the party should be also explained. While there was a great number of female activists, none of them ever had any real responsibility (Colectivo Flamel 1985; Milá 2012). This is in line with most of far right parties, which are configured as true patriarchal organizations or men's parties (Männerparteien) (Mudde 2007).

[18]The event with the most repercussion was the murder of the leftist militant Yolanda González in 1980 by several members of FN.

"direct action," left the party in 1978 and created two new organizations, namely Frente Nacional de la Juventud (FNJ) and Frente de la Juventud (FJ), located in Barcelona and Madrid, respectively.[19]

Just after winning a seat in parliament in 1979, FN made some organizational transformations and created new internal sections, such as public health, education, and family, among others (Rodríguez 1991: 278). Theoretically, such additions would have to contribute to the organizational consistency regarding the internal dimension of the institutionalization process (see Table 2). Nevertheless, these organizational changes were only cosmetic, and the sections had no real political impact, as they were "empty." Similarly, the role of its labor union, Fuerza Nueva del Trabajo (FNT), was quite marginal because, while its organizational structure was highly sophisticated on paper, there was no real "living organization," as pointed out by Lorite (2007: 138). Furthermore, the party was well established throughout Spain, having considerable presence in regions such as Madrid or Castilla y León. Party nationalization is one of the most important factors regarding the institutionalization process. However, FN did not know how to take advantage of its circumstances. It is also true that no internal democracy existed and that provincial leaders were designated directly by Piñar, causing discontent in the party's militant base.

Organize to achieve sustainability. VOX and the evolution of the Spanish far right to the modern party paradigm

To contextualize our second case, it must be noted that VOX was officially registered as a political party in December 2013. A small group of individuals with ties to PP decided to create a new political alternative as a result of their dissatisfaction with what they perceived as PP drifting to the center ground and becoming "a toy of the Left" (Abascal 2015: 55).

VOX first stood for election in the European Parliament elections in May 2014. Although it obtained a respectable result (246,833 votes), it fell short of achieving representation (see Table A2). These results were viewed positively by party leaders, considering it was the party's first time entering the fray; however, they were also disappointed at falling just short of obtaining representation. After the European elections, the party entered a turbulent time. Then, notable leaders and founding members abandoned the party, claiming that they did not want to contribute to breaking up the right-wing vote (Cañizares 2015). Beyond ideological and strategic confrontations, important party figures splitting from the party in early 2015 revealed far-reaching internal disputes. The splinter group was willing to approach more centered parties to reach agreements and potential coalitions. On the other hand, the party leadership, headed by Abascal, aimed to maintain VOX's ideological consistency and create organizational depth. In short, this was a crucial time for understanding VOX's subsequent development considering the debate around whether to position the party as a conservative force with a liberal approach or follow a purely right-wing direction (a "straightforward right-wing party"). In the

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[19]More than parties, FNJ and FJ were quasi-paramilitary organizations that were involved in several violent actions during the democratic transition. For an interesting testimony of one of their militants, see Milá (2012).

end, Abascal's strategy was implemented, leading VOX to lean further right on the ideological spectrum.

Then, electorally, VOX underwent "years in the wilderness" with disappointing performances in several elections (see Table A2). In this period, VOX adopted a strategy based on taking a leading role in the judicial realm. Thus, seeking to obtain both higher visibility and increased relevance, the party initiated a legal offensive and filed charges in various legal cases related to its understanding of the Spanish identity (whistling the Spanish anthem at sporting events, corruption cases, or the Catalan independence movement). VOX adopted a particularly active and belligerent role in the Catalan conflict, taking part as a private prosecutor in the open judicial process sparked by the illegal independence referendum of 1 October 2017 in Catalonia. This strategy appears to have paid off. As the political and social conflict and polarization around the Catalan issue became more pronounced, VOX was once again able to achieve relevance. A rally organized by the party at the Palacio Vistalegre in October 2018, which had 9,000 attendees, received widespread media coverage. In fact, during the electoral campaign for Andalusian elections, VOX received much more media coverage than parties with similar voting intentions (Olalla et al. 2019). This event is significant because it was the first time since FN that the Spanish far right drew large crowds. VOX approached the regional elections of Andalusia on 2 December 2018 with this positive dynamic, achieving 395,978 votes and 12 seats in the Andalusian Parliament. Then, the party was able to establish itself in different arenas, including national, regional, local, and European. Moreover, since February 2022, VOX has been part of the government coalition with PP in Castilla y León.

Strengths and weaknesses in VOX organizational institutionalization

Focusing on the external dimension of VOX organizational institutionalization, on the one hand, when VOX burst onto scene, the party was perceived as a credible rival, buttressed by an increasingly solid internal organization. There was a response, particularly on the part of the mainstream center-right (PP) and to a lesser degree of liberals (Ciudadanos – Cs–[20]), which consisted of radicalizing their discourses regarding noneconomic issues in line with VOX's proposals to try to neutralize the new electoral appeal of their novel competitor (i.e., "accommodative strategy") (Meguid 2005: 349). Consequently, this ideological turn contributed to making the agenda of VOX more respectable in the eyes of society. Moreover, initially, both PP and Cs adopted a collaborative stance with VOX, accepting its support where it was needed to form governments (namely, in Andalusia and Murcia) or even including the far-right party in the government (Castilla y León). In contrast, other mainstream parties – mainly the social democratic PSOE or the radical leftist Podemos – oscillated between ignoring and a strategy of fierce demonization. To summarize, VOX has altered its competitors' behavior, hereby gaining reputation and credibility. All this contrasts with the case of FN, since as has

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[20]Cs is a centre-right party with liberal orientation that was born in Cataluña in 2005. In 2015, Cs entered in the national parliament for the first time.

been previously explained, then the mainstream parties opted to ignore the far-right party.

In relation to the internal leadership dynamics within the internal dimension of organizational institutionalization, VOX was formed under the leadership of Santiago Abascal. Despite his youth, Abascal already had a history in different government and public roles as a member of PP, as well as in being involved in activism against ETA.[21] In addition, the rest of the core group of founders included individuals with important ties to PP (Sangiao 2018).VOX clearly started as a far right option whose founders came from the mainstream center-right instead of the broken-up and diffuse far right universe. This is important because the party started off with considerable prior political capital, meaning that its leaders already had experience with political competition dynamics. Abascal can be considered a solvent leader with good rhetorical skills; however, he is still far from the charismatic aura of Piñar or other far right European leaders such as Wilders, Haider, or Salvini. In contrast with FN, VOX is not such a personalist party and has competent second-level leaders such as Ortega Smith, Espinosa de los Monteros, and Monasterio. This allows Abascal to remain shielded from public opinion. The distribution of power between the different party levels reflects the centralized, hierarchical character of VOX. The insightful, well-founded study of Barrio et al. (2021) offers an overview of the internal distribution of power within the party, which is controlled by a central body: the National Executive Committee. The National Executive Committee has only 12 members who are elected by the General Assembly – which is composed of all the members of the party – using a closed-list ballot. It is revealing that the territorial representatives (from "provincias") do not participate in the National Executive Committee. This shows the party's aim not to be a federal party but rather to be a strongly centralized, vertical party.

Regarding the recruitment, training, and socialization dynamics of militants and elites, there are several aspects to be stressed. After its electoral breakthrough in 2019 in different arenas (national, regional, local, and European), VOX received a large number of affiliations (see Table A3). In light of the typology proposed by Art (which is based on other studies such as those of Panebianco (1988) or Harmel and Janda (1994)), far right activists can be defined as "extremists" (those who show explicitly racist and authoritarian attitudes and come from the more radicalized subgroups), "moderates" (those who accept democratic rules and do not have biologically racist ideas but ethnopluralist orientations) and "opportunists" (those who are more interested in power and personal careers than in an ideology itself) (2011: 32–3). The success of this model is usually linked to the great proportion of moderates and a small number of extremists. However, in contrast to the traditional Spanish far right (FN is a good example), which attracted mainly extremists, VOX seems to attract mainly moderates and opportunists – the majority from PP – with a transversal sociodemographic profile. However, this does not imply that extremists are not interested in the party.[22] In general terms, the party elite effectively communicates consistent and unified messages to militants. The degree of

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[21]An autobiographic profile of Abascal can be found in Abascal (2014).

[22]For example, Plataforma per Catalunya (PxC), a far right party that gained influence in the local arena in Cataluña in the 2000s, has been dissolved and has been integrated into VOX (Faus 2019).

factionalism is low and while there have been some internal dissenting voices, the elite maintains a strong discipline. For example, a dissident faction left the party and created a split called TúPatria in July 2020,[23] but the party remained marginal, and VOX was not affected. Additionally, critical voices have been silenced by the party's direction, such as during the national congress in March 2020 (González 2020). In sum, there is evidence of the existence of routinized mechanisms to address internal conflicts.

Although clear links between VOX and traditional far right parties are known,[24] in general, the party has maintained a respectable public image. Until now, the party has managed the delicate balance between "extremists," "moderates," and "opportunists." This is largely due to the use of human capital management formulas that are common in the business environment and in modern political parties. In this respect, it should be noted that VOX hired and audited firms to examine their candidates' profiles before regional and local elections in 2019 (Carvajal 2019). In turn, the party has started to offer political and communicational formation to its militants and candidates. Likewise, after its first breakthrough in 2018, the party has progressively increased its professional staff, whose number is currently approximately 50–60 (Europa Press 2019). All of this points to the existence of a plan to build a professionalized organization.

VOX is also establishing international networks alongside other far right parties. The party decided to integrate itself into the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament (conformed by conservative center-right and moderate far right parties), and not into Identity and Democracy, where the majority of the far right parties abide. In fact, the Spanish far right has excellent links with Polish Law and Justice or the Italian Brothers of Italy. In addition, VOX has external delegations in many countries of Europe, Latin America, and North America, which is evidence of its great organizational expansion beyond Spain.

Conclusions

This article addresses the extent to which the electoral sustainability of far right parties might be driven by the nature of their organizational institutionalization processes. To test this argument, we focus on two Spanish parties characterized by divergent electoral trajectories, namely, FN and VOX. Our research is therefore aligned with an approach that encourages the study of RRPs through an internalist perspective; in other words, it is an approach that focuses on the characteristics of the parties themselves (Art 2011; Goodwin 2006; Mudde 2007).

First, our in-depth analysis of FN's evolution has shed light on its problematic and poor institutionalization process. Initially, the party was considerably extended over all of Spain and was started from significant material and organizational

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[23]TúPatria seems to represented a return to the more traditional, moderate conservatism (but in essence, the ideological offer from the split and VOX are just identical). For an overview of its ideas, see: TúPatria (2020).

[24]To name just a few examples: Jorge Buxadé, member of the party leadership and candidate to the European Elections 2019, was a former militant of the Falange, and Jorge Cutillas – deputy in the Parliament of Madrid – was an activist of FN.

resources generated by the Francoist regime. FN was a hierarchized and personalist organization centered around the figure of Piñar. Although this is not surprising, since the majority of far right parties are quite centralized and personalist, in the case of FN, it was crucial for various reasons. The leadership of the party lacked the necessary strategic skills to develop a political party in a competitive framework. As they came from a dictatorship environment, they thought that only the charisma of Piñar was enough. Consequently, the FN neglected important aspects and never developed into a structured, bureaucratic party machine. Amateurism prevailed, and there were neither professionalization nor routinized mechanisms in place. This short-term vision of the party elite, alongside the belligerent strategies of their competitors (which negatively impacted the external side of institutionalization), made it impossible for FN to sustain their electoral gains (Table 5).

In contrast, the case of VOX tells a different story. The newcomer to the Spanish political arena is also a hierarchized, centralized party; however, a key difference is that it has developed clear strategies to ensure cohesiveness, coherence, and organizational strength. In this sense, VOX has applied organizational techniques typical of modern parties (formal political training, candidate selection, etc.) and has made progress in the professionalization of its staff. The prior political capital of the party leadership could have been decisive in this respect. In addition, the collaborative role of mainstream parties gave the far-right party an aura of credibility and respectability. All these factors have allowed the party to maintain and build upon its initial breakthrough.

Overall, we have demonstrated that our hypothesis regarding the positive role of organizational institutionalization on electoral sustainability is plausible. However, it could be argued that other factors not considered in this article may have also conditioned the electoral sustainability of both parties. Most notably, among those possible "confounding variables," we find historical and contextual factors. On the one hand, FN emerged in the context of the transition process from the Francoist autocratic regime to a democratic model. The international order – in particular, the United States and the other European countries – favored the new democratic regime and provided support to its democratic actors. Consequently, the international order looked askance at actors such as FN who wanted to destabilize the transition process. On the other hand, the breakthrough of VOX should be understood in the context of the transformation of the Spanish party system, which has developed from a two-party to a multiparty system. In recent years, the traditional center-right (PP) has seen its legitimacy eroded and other rightist competitors such as VOX or Cs have emerged. In addition, the rise in secessionist demands by Catalan nationalist parties has further strained territorial debate, which undoubtedly favors extremist positions such as that adopted by VOX.

Alternatively, the trajectories of both parties can also be explained by their different motivations. In the traditional Dowsian approach, all members of a party agree on the aim of the party's aim, namely, to maximize electoral support (Downs 1958: 25). In contrast, other voices suggest that parties are not homogeneous but are instead composed of several groups with different preferences about what should be the main objective of the party. Sánchez-Cuenca (1999: 6–7) distinguishes between "moderates" – who are vote-maximizers and are only interested in winning elections – and "radicals" – who are mainly interested in preserving ideological essences–.

Table 5. Overview of variables and results

Variables	Theoretical concept	FN	VOX
Dependent variable	Electoral sustainability	Unsustainable: representation in the national parliament in 1977 but not in the subsequent elections	Sustainable: representation in the national parliament in April 2019 and November 2019
Independent variable	Organizational institutionalization	1. External dimension • Other parties ignored FN and did not consider the far right as a 'real competitor'. Center-right parties did not adopt the far right's narrative 2. Internal dimension: • The elite is composed of Piñar and his friends and relatives. There is no requirement for political or professional merit • The party elite is not able to control the violent sectors. There are no routinized mechanisms to solve internal tensions • The leadership transmits diffuse and ambiguous message • The majority of militants and candidates explicitly support antidemocratic ideas and Francoist regime. The party is strongly masculinized. Two groups of militants: over 55 years old and under 25 • There is no infrastructure to train candidates. • No professional staff. Amateurism prevails	1. External dimension • After VOX's breakthrough, political competitors radicalized their discourse, adopting the far right's narrative. Collaboration between mainstream parties and far right in sub-national arenas 2. Internal dimension: • There is a clear structure of the party elite. Existence of competent second-level leaders. • The party has clear and efficient mechanisms to control the internal dissent • The ideological and organizational message transmitted by the elite is quite consistent • Although the party attracted extremists, the majority of the candidates did not show explicit extremist ideas. The sociodemographic profile of militants is diverse • The party offers training to cadres ad candidates. Candidates are chosen using marketing techniques • There is a professional staff apart from the elite and the militants

Notes: Own elaboration.

Depending on what fraction is dominant at each moment, parties prioritize one objective or another, i.e., either to be pragmatic and orientate to gain votes or to be faithful to primitive ideological values. In the case of FN, the hegemonic fraction of the party elite can be qualified as radical; thus, it makes sense that the party did not consider moderating itself, despite there being a clear gap between their proposals and the attitudes of Spanish society.

Notwithstanding the above, our research has identified plausible mechanisms between organizational institutionalization and electoral sustainability. Thus, through a narrative typical of ideographic explanations, it has become clear that there is a temporal order with respect to concrete organizational decisions and subsequent electoral performances in the case of the analyzed parties. In essence, organizational institutionalization seems to be important for the electoral sustainability of far right parties. Although this idea can be easily extended to all kinds of parties, as Janda and Colman (1998) pointed out and how it is explained in the initial theoretical review, it is especially important for far right parties. This is specifically because they face greater challenges as they are subjected to stricter public scrutiny due to their radical ideas, which often threaten diversity and social convivence.

We believe our findings contribute to the debate regarding factors that affect far right parties' trajectory by strengthening an approach focused on the internal sphere of parties themselves. This research has shed light on a little-studied issue for the far right, namely, the organizational dimension. Nevertheless, our research is not without limitations. The idiosyncratic character of the study limits the empirical generalization of our findings. Future research should expand this view by examining organizational variables in large N comparative approaches and considering more parties and countries.

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