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## THE RISE OF VOX AND POPULISM ON YOUTUBE BEFORE AND DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

### EL AUGE DE VOX Y EL POPULISMO EN YOUTUBE ANTES Y DURANTE LA PANDEMIA DEL COVID-19

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#### ABSTRACT

YouTube is one of the platforms most used by young people for viewing audiovisual content on the Internet. Although several recent studies analyze the trends in searches for political videos on YouTube, no study analyzes the evolution of the popularity of Spanish political parties on this social network. For this research, we will use a quantitative and qualitative methodology based on data from the Google Trends platform to find out the evolution of the popularity of these parties on YouTube before and during the pandemic. The results place Vox (7.6) as the most searched party on YouTube over the last ten years, followed by United We Can (6.3), PSOE (4.4), and PP (3.5). In the period of the pandemic, Vox increased its popularity (15.3) and the Popular Party came in second place (4.2). We performed a statistical analysis to compare the most searched match on YouTube with the rest of the matches in both periods. The regression analysis of searches between "Vox" and "PP" during the last decade was  $R^2 = 0.51$  and during the period of the pandemic  $R^2 = 0.15$ . The correlation of "Vox" with the other parties was  $R < 0.06$  in both periods. We conclude that Vox has become the most sought-after party on YouTube during the Covid-19 pandemic, a social network used mainly by young people. A factor that determines the recent success of a party that some authors associate with a populist discourse.

**Keywords:** Populism; Youtube; New technologies; Multiscreen; Streaming; Google Trends; Video.

## RESUMEN

YouTube es una de las plataformas más empleadas por los jóvenes para el visionado de contenido audiovisual en Internet. Aunque varios estudios recientes analizan las tendencias de las búsquedas de vídeos políticos en YouTube no hay ningún estudio que analice la evolución de la popularidad de los partidos políticos españoles en dicha red social. Para esta investigación emplearemos una metodología cuantitativa y cualitativa basada en datos de la plataforma Google Trends con el objetivo de averiguar la evolución de la popularidad de estos partidos en YouTube antes y durante la pandemia. Los resultados sitúan a Vox (7,6) como el partido más buscado en YouTube durante los últimos diez años, seguido de Unidas Podemos (6,3), PSOE (4,4) y PP (3,5). En el periodo de la pandemia, Vox aumenta su popularidad (15,3) y Partido Popular queda en segundo lugar (4,2). Realizamos un análisis estadístico para comparar el partido más buscado en YouTube con el resto de los partidos en ambos periodos. El análisis de regresión de las búsquedas entre "Vox" y "PP" durante la última década fue de  $R^2 = 0,51$  y durante el periodo de la pandemia de  $R^2 = 0,15$ . La correlación de "Vox" con los demás partidos en fue de  $R < 0,06$  ambos periodos. Concluimos que Vox se ha convertido en el partido más buscado en YouTube durante la pandemia del Covid-19, una red social usada principalmente por jóvenes. Factor que determina el reciente éxito de un partido que algunos autores relacionan con un discurso populista.

**Palabras clave:** Populismo; Youtube; Nuevas tecnologías; Multipantalla; Streaming; Google Trends; Video.

## A ASCENSÃO DO VOX E DO POPULISMO NO YOUTUBE ANTES E DURANTE A PANDEMIA DO COVID-19

### RESUMO:

YouTube é uma das plataformas mais utilizadas pelos jovens para visualização de conteúdos audiovisuais na Internet. Embora vários estudos recentes analisaram as tendências nas buscas de vídeos políticos no YouTube, não há nenhum estudo que analise a evolução da popularidade dos partidos políticos espanhóis na referida rede social. Para esta pesquisa, utilizaremos uma metodologia quantitativa e qualitativa baseada em dados da plataforma Google Trends a fim de descobrir a evolução da popularidade desses partidos no YouTube antes e durante a pandemia. Os resultados colocam o Vox (7,6) como o partido mais pesquisado no YouTube nos últimos dez anos, seguido por United We Can (6,3), PSOE (4,4) e PP (3,5). No período da pandemia, o Vox aumenta sua popularidade (15,3) e o Partido Popular fica em segundo lugar (4,2). Executamos uma análise estatística para comparar a correspondência mais pesquisada no YouTube com o restante das correspondências nos dois períodos. A análise de regressão das buscas entre "Vox" e "PP" durante a última década foi  $R^2 = 0,51$  e durante o período de pandemia  $R^2 = 0,15$ . A correlação do "Vox" com os demais partidos foi  $R < 0,06$  nos dois períodos. Concluímos que o Vox se tornou o partido político mais procurado no YouTube durante a pandemia de Covid-19, rede social utilizada principalmente por jovens.

Fator que determina o sucesso recente de um partido que alguns autores relacionam a um discurso populista.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Populismo, YouTube, novas tecnologias, multiscreen, streaming, Google Trends, vídeo.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Covid-19 in Spain**

Steve Bannon, the main ideologue of Donald Trump's media campaign, points out that populist political leaders are more likely to govern a country when there is a deep social and economic crisis. The Covid-19 pandemic has generated a very serious impact on the world economy. Specifically, the GDP of Spain fell by 11.6% in 2020 (Kahan, 2018). Although the social, health and economic consequences of the crisis remain to be seen, we can analyze how the popularity of Spanish politicians has changed, and specifically of those considered populists, during the first year and a half of the pandemic. The measures imposed by the Spanish government to curb the Covid-19 pandemic have been highly criticized by Vox, a party led by Santiago Abascal, and considered by several recent studies (Vampa, 2020; González Castro, 2021) as an example of right-wing populism in Spain. Vox's criticism of the government for the management of the pandemic reached Congress in October 2020 through a motion of censure that unsuccessfully tried to remove Pedro Sánchez from Moncloa.

In early 2020, Tedros Adhanom, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the Covid-19 outbreak had become a pandemic. Given the increase in deaths and infections, the Spanish government decreed a state of alert on March 14<sup>th</sup>, allowing citizens to leave their homes only in certain circumstances.

On October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, given the escalation of positive cases of Covid-19, the Spanish government declared a second state of alert, and on October 29<sup>th</sup>, the House of Representatives approved the extension of the state of alert until May 2021. Both states of alarm were challenged by Vox before the constitutional court and both were declared unconstitutional.

### **1.2. Populism: concept and political parties**

Populism comes from the suffix *ism* (doctrine and/or tendency) and the word "popular", from the Latin *popularis*, relative to the people (López, 2000; DEEL, 2020). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the interwar period, the term was used to refer to very heterogeneous political movements, both rural and urban, throughout the world (Rivas, 2019). If fascism was a reaction against the emancipatory possibilities of its time, contemporary populism is a reaction against the lack of ideas and political reactions that current society is experiencing (Matthews-Ferrero, 2018). For some authors (Rivas, 2019), this may constitute a threat to democratic values when its

substantial content is exclusive and anti-democratic.

The idea of populism is used in politics in a pejorative way to denigrate political opponents to relate it to demagoguery (Álvarez, 2014; Ylarri, 2015). In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, several authors (Jareño Romera, 2019) consider that populism causes the division of society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the pure people versus the corrupt elite. And, therefore, populism defends that politics should be the expression of the general will of the people (Jareño Romera, 2019).

Populism itself cannot be placed on the political spectrum of the left and/or right, therefore, there are populist discourses of different political courts. Likewise, populist movements can also mix left or right-wing positions, for example, combining xenophobic attitudes, commonly associated with the extreme right, with redistributive economic policies closer to those of the left.

The ideologies with which populism can be paired can be contradictory, giving rise to different forms of populism that can oppose each other (Brett, 2013). For example, in Latin America during the 1990s, populism was often associated with politicians like Peru's Alberto Fujimori who promoted neoliberal economics, while in the 2000s it was associated with those that promoted socialist programs, like Venezuela's Hugo Chavez (Ylarri, 2015). Besides left-wing and right-wing populists, populist figures such as Italy's Beppe Grillo have been characterized as centrist and liberal, while groups such as Turkey's Justice and Development Party have been described as conflating populism with Islamism (Park, 2018), and India's Bharatiya, the Janata Party has been considered to conflate populism with Hindu nationalism (McDonnell, & Cabrera, 2019). Although populists from different ideological traditions can oppose each other, they can also form coalitions, as seen in the Greek coalition government that brought together left-wing populist Syriza and Greek independent right-wing populists in 2015 (Brett, 2013).

Supporters of the ideational definition (Jareño Romera, 2019) have also distinguished left-wing and right-wing populists. The latter manifests itself as the juxtaposition of the people and the elite, as well as an additional group, which is also considered a group separate from the people and favored by the elite, such as immigrants, homosexuals, travelers, or communists. In terms of political rights, populism is often conflated with nationalism, and people and nations become interchangeable categories in its discourse.

Since the financial crisis of 2008, a wave of populist parties has flooded the international political arena. Several recent studies (Cortese and Proffitt, 2012; Berrocal-Gonzalo et al., 2017; Matthews-Ferrero, 2018; Sánchez Castillo, 2018; Zugasti and García, 2018; Rivas, 2019; Rodríguez-Serrano et al., 2019; Žuk and Žuk, 2020) have researched populist discourses and the influence of their leaders on the electorate. The arrival of Donald Trump to the United States government marks a climax in this type of political speech on the international scene (Villa-Gracia and Cerdán, 2020). As well as LePen's success in the French elections, some Brexit speeches, or a sector of the Catalan independence movement. Beyond mixing with

other ideologies, the core of populism consists of the simplification and restriction of ideological concepts to better reach the electorate (Matthews-Ferrero, 2018).

In Spain, several studies (Casero-Ripollés, Sintés-Olivella, & Franch, 2017; Barberá & Martín del Fresno, 2019) have researched the populist nature of the Podemos political party and its leader Pablo Iglesias, others have done so on the incursion of the extreme right in the Spanish political landscape, through Vox and its leader Santiago Abascal (Rinken, 2019; Ferreira, 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Dementiev, 2019; Sampietro and Sánchez-Castillo, 2020, Vampa, 2020).

Although Vox and Podemos were founded in the early 2010s, the two parties have followed different paths. Podemos won, four months after its formation (2014), five seats with 7.98% of the votes in the European elections (Vidal, 2018). And since then, it has achieved a presence in public institutions, becoming, since 2020, one of the parties that are part of the Spanish government after reaching an agreement with the PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español).

Vox was founded in 2013 and did not have parliamentary representatives until the Andalusian elections of December 2018, where it won 12 seats and approximately 11% of the votes. On April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Vox increased its presence in Spanish institutions, when the party obtained 10.26% of the votes in the general elections. Much of the success of Vox, according to recent studies (Ferreira, 2019; Rodríguez, 2021) arose through the interaction of messages with political content on various social networks, including YouTube.

Although several authors (Rinken, 2019; Ferreira, 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Olivás, 2021; González Castro, 2021) have related the policies of Vox and Podemos (or Unidas Podemos) with that of populist parties, other authors (Rodríguez, 2021; González Castro, 2021) indicate that some parties and candidates from traditional parties such as PSOE or PP have adopted populist discourses in recent years.

### **1.3. Populism, fake news, post-truth**

The rise of political parties with populist discourses has increased in the world since the financial crisis of 2008 but also due to the development of new technologies that allow a faster exchange of messages and ideological content. According to several authors (Cavaller, 2017; Hernández-Santaolalla and Sola-Morales, 2019), technological advances have allowed users to comment and interact in real-time while the news is happening. So, there is a greater risk than in the information exchange of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that a piece of news is not verified and is spread to millions of people who take it as true. This new proliferation of fake news is due to the immediacy offered by new information technologies in data exchange (Cavaller, 2017; Hernández Conde and Fernández García, 2019).

Even though a piece of news is identified as false a few hours after it has been broadcast, many users will not want to assume that it is false because the content of the news fits their ideology or they are simply not interested in knowing the truth. Several authors (Cavaller, 2017; Hernández-Santaolalla and Sola-Morales, 2019) have called this type of interaction "post-truth", typical of the strategies of populist

parties (Hernández Conde and Fernández García, 2019).

According to several research works (Rinken, 2019; Ferreira, 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019), these types of attitudes tend to develop more effectively in conflictive environments such as an economic crisis or a pandemic. In complicated social situations, citizens are more likely to act guided by their emotions, without contrasting the information they are consuming or disseminating on social networks. One of the latest, most prominent examples was the dissemination of messages on Twitter by former President Donald Trump denouncing, without definitive evidence, fraud in the last presidential elections in the United States. This speech, aimed at the emotions of a part of his electorate, culminated in the assault on the United States Capitol (Cottrell et al., 2018). The event ended with 4 civilians dead, 52 people arrested, a policeman killed, and 14 injured. NATO intelligence services informed their governments that the incidents were part of an attempted coup carried out by President Trump with the possible support of members of the federal security agencies (Prother, 2021). This caused the social network Twitter to expel a president of the United States for the first time in history.

#### **1.4. New technologies and the aestheticization of politics**

The study of the influence of the media on politics is not something new. Several authors (Rancière, 2006; Rockhill and Watts, 2009; Ungureanu, 2015; Arceo, 2021) have determined that much of the populist discourse is determined by Walter Benjamin's philosophical idea of political aestheticization. That is the ability of politicians, through the use of technological advances, to transmit ideas, ideologies, and even myths to citizens and even modify human behavior.

Mobile phones, computers, and modern televisions can connect the world's citizens through social networks and the Internet. These changes modify, according to some authors (Ungureanu, 2015; Losiggio, 2018), the way of understanding and participating in politics.

The aestheticization of politics (Babul, 2011; Arceo, 2021) ensures that one of the main characteristics of current societies is the importance of image or spectacle, where a modification of the real image of society is produced, to transform it into a more entertaining product, more attractive to consumers.

Political, advertising and marketing activities are responsible for educating consumer tastes through meaningful information in a specific context and for a specific purpose: to sell products, ideas, and make certain things look good, interesting, and convenient (Ungureanu, 2015). The media provide ideological information that is transformed into attitudes towards the world because they form and train senses, feelings, and create beliefs to determine certain social practices. With the appearance of the Internet and, later, social networks, this exchange of ideological information becomes a more complex process, where users actively intervene creating content of all kinds, be it texts, images, memes, videos... This unstoppable activity has modified the way that 20<sup>th</sup>-century users had to consume television, radio, or other traditional mass media (Barrientos Báez et al., 2019). And, therefore,

it has modified the interaction of voters with their leaders and, above all, communication strategies in electoral campaigns.

All these factors greatly influence the success or failure of a politician. The degree of popularity is conditioned by technological factors that determine the so-called aestheticization of politics (Rosario and Quintana, 2010; Arceo, 2021). If political candidates do not have a presence on television or the Internet, it is very difficult for citizens to know them and vote for them. Hence, the current importance of political candidates having a resonance in Internet searches, either on search engines such as Google or on social networks such as YouTube (Lobillo Mora and Gallart Moreno, 2020).

### **1.5. The multiscreen and YouTube**

The audiovisual industry is undergoing an unprecedented transformation stage due to the technological innovations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Guerrero et al., 2018; Cerdán et al., 2021). From a linear television model to an interconnected, multiscreen, interactive, and personalized television, the processes of production, marketing, and viewing of audiovisual content have been modified and simplified. This digital convergence merges three main industries: audiovisual, information technology, and telecommunications (Cerdán et al., 2021). According to Guerrero et al. (2018), the possibility of YouTube users' videos gaining millions of views over traditional works of the advertising or television industry with a moderate budget is of great importance for contemporary audiovisual scenes, and most importantly, before the rise of digital natives.

This transformation in modern societies of audiovisual consumption through the Internet also has implications and is related to political changes. All populist leaders have a prominent presence on YouTube, either in their own content or generated by users who support or are opposed to their policies. For several authors (Rodríguez-Serrano et al., 2019), the proliferation of these types of videos on YouTube has generated an increase in populist political speeches, such as videos that incite Islamophobia and anti-Europeanism (Rodríguez-Serrano et al., 2019).

For years, the political content broadcast on traditional television has been related to the interaction that citizens make on the Internet. Besides searching Google for content related to what they saw on television, future voters also consume videos on YouTube about current political issues (Rodríguez-Serrano et al., 2019). And in this sense, the Spanish populist parties have a large number of YouTube subscribers. For example, Vox has 382,000 subscribers and Podemos has 116,000. The generalist parties, with a more moderate ideology, PP (Partido Popular), PSOE, and Ciudadanos have less influence on YouTube "viewers". The PP has 79,700, Ciudadanos has 54,200, and the PSOE has 26,700 subscribers.

Although several studies have been carried out on the influence of Spanish populist parties on YouTube and other social networks (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Ferreira, 2019; Sampietro and Sánchez-Castillo, 2020), to date no work researches the evolution of searches about Spanish populist parties on YouTube during the Covid-19 pandemic and neither in the last decade (2010-2020).

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of this research is to find out the evolution of the popularity of Spanish parties through searches carried out on YouTube to determine the importance of populist parties in this social network. First, we will carry out an analysis of a historical period, (from 2011 to 2021), and second, of only the first years of the Covid-19 pandemic in Spain (from February 2020 to December 2021). The secondary objective is to find out if there is a statistical correlation in searches for the most searched political party on YouTube and the rest of the Spanish parties. The third objective is to carry out a qualitative analysis of the dates with a higher volume of searches in both periods.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

This research performs a quantitative analysis of the most searched topics on the YouTube platform through the data provided by the Google Trends platform. Recent research (Kamiński et al., 2019; Quintanilha et al., 2019; Cerdán y Padilla, 2019) use a similar methodology to study trends on topics of social interest in YouTube and/or Google.

The YouTube platform provides a text-based search function and results are selected based on the match of these search terms with video descriptions, tags, comments, etc. (Hardwick, 2020). Any user can consume YouTube videos without being registered, and those who are can also share, rate, or comment on videos, among other advanced functions. More than 1.9 billion users access the portal every month, which has local versions in 91 countries and allows browsing in 80 languages (YouTube, 2020). Recent studies (Berrocal-Gonzalo et al., 2017; Rodríguez-Serrano et al., 2019; Villa-Gracia and Cerdán, 2020) have used YouTube searches to research various social issues since, being one of the main platforms for audiovisual consumption, these data are representative according to the interests and trends of contemporary societies.

The data provided by Google Trends is an impartial, anonymous, and categorized sample of search data on the YouTube platform. This makes it possible to measure the interest in one or several topics of interest in any part of the world (Mahroum et al., 2018). The analysis method has two filter options. Live data is a random search sample from the last week of search history. A non-real-time random sample that collects a set of Google data from 2008 to the last 36 hours, allowing comparisons to be made between different topics of interest.

All of this data is combined into a chart that shows how often a particular term is searched for in one or more world regions. The horizontal axis of the chart represents time (since 2008) and the vertical axis represents the YouTube search frequency scale from 0 to 100, with 0 being the least popular and 100 being the most popular. Google Trends also allows you to see differences in search concepts between regions of the world and also within the territory of each country. The Google Trends platform normalizes your data through the following process (Google, 2020). Each data point is divided by the total searches for the geography and the

time range it represents to compare relative popularity. Otherwise, the places with the highest search volume would always rank higher. The resulting numbers are scaled in a range from 0 to 100 based on the ratio of one topic to all searches across all topics. Different regions that show the same search interest for a term do not always have the same total search volumes. For example, a country with few inhabitants where 80% of queries correspond to a specific word, will reflect a higher score than a country with a large population where only 40% of queries correspond to this word (Google, 2020).

We will use data from Google Trends to perform two analyses. The first will be a descriptive statistical analysis where we will show the global search rates and the main peaks of interest in two periods, that of the last ten years (2011 to 2021) and that of the pandemic (from February 2020 to December 2021). Later we will identify the party that obtained the highest search volume and the party that obtained the highest peak of interest. Finally, we will carry out several regression analyses to assess the correlation in the interest of YouTube searches between the most popular party on this social network and the other Spanish parties.

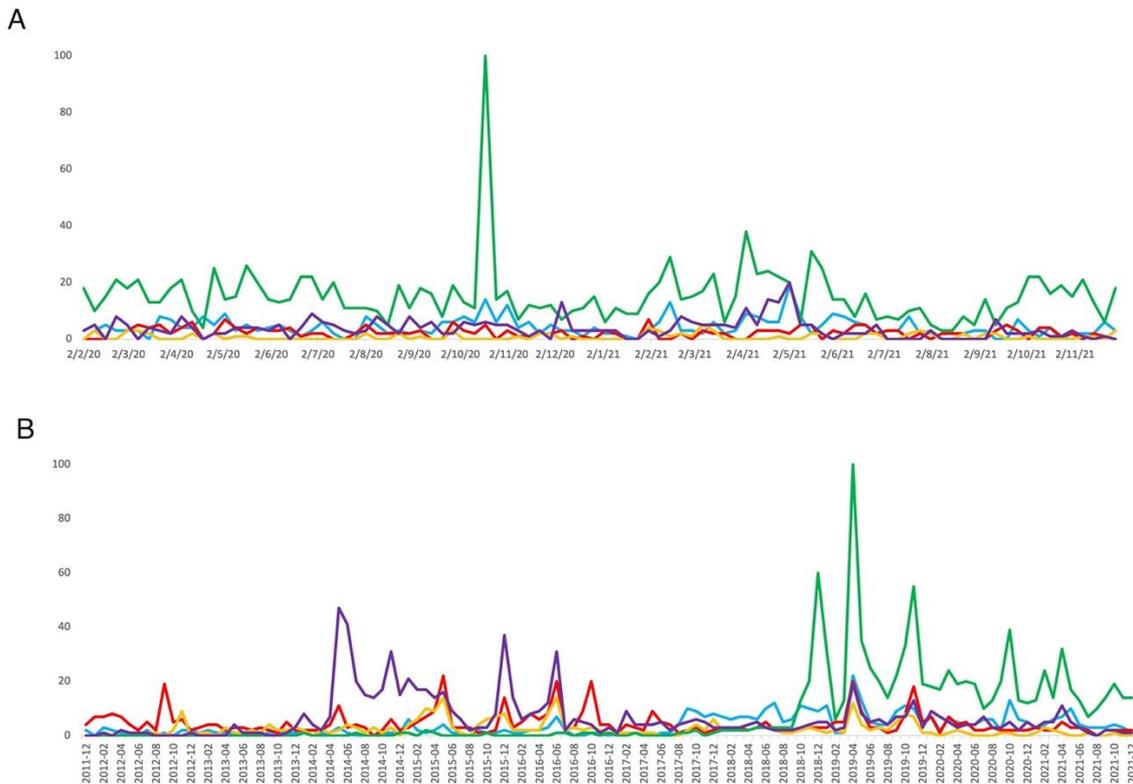
#### **4. RESULTS**

The results show a global index of searches in the historical period (2011-2021) led by Vox (7.6) and Unidas Podemos (6.3), followed by the PSOE (4.4), PP (3.6), and Ciudadanos (2.3) (Figure 1, A). During the period of the Covid-19 pandemic (from February 2020 to December 2021), Vox leads the list of the most searched parties on YouTube (15.3). Next are: PP (4.2), Unidas Podemos (3.6), PSOE (2.1), and Ciudadanos (0.8) (Figure 1, B).

The maximum peak of searches during the historical period occurs in April 2019 in searches carried out for the Vox party (100). A date that coincides with the entry into congress with 24 seats of Abascal's party. During the pandemic, the highest rate of searches occurs on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020, also in favor of the party of Santiago Abascal (100). A date that coincides with the failed motion of censure against the government of Pedro Sánchez for the management of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Figure 1**

*Time chart (A) of the historical period and Time chart (B) of the pandemic period*



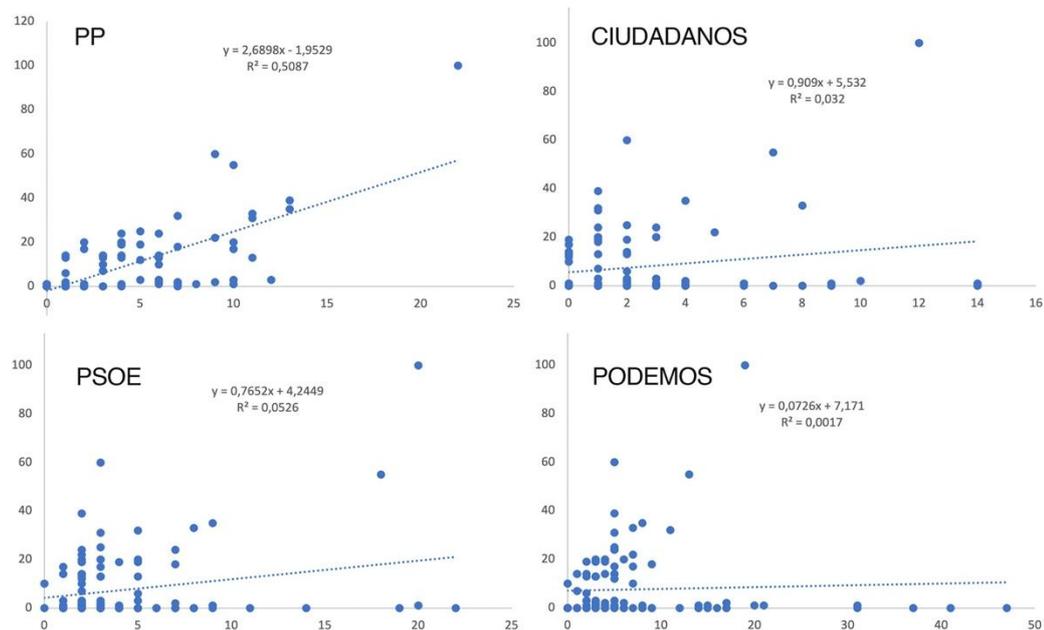
**Source:** Own elaboration

Likewise, the chart shows (Figure 1, A) a predominant interest in “Podemos” between May 2014 and June 2016, obtaining a maximum search peak in December 2015. Search interest in “Vox” arises in October 2018 and reaches its first peak in December 2018 (60). From that date, until the end of 2021, it remains the party with the most searches on YouTube (Figure 1, A).

During the period of the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 2, B), searches for “Vox” show a much higher interest than the rest of the parties throughout the year. Only surpassed by “Unidas Podemos” at the beginning of December 2020 (13) and equaled at the beginning of May 2021 (20). This last date coincides with the resignation of Pablo Iglesias from “Unidas Podemos”.

**Figure 2**

*Regression analysis between searches on YouTube for "Vox" and the other political parties during the last ten years (2011 to 2021)*



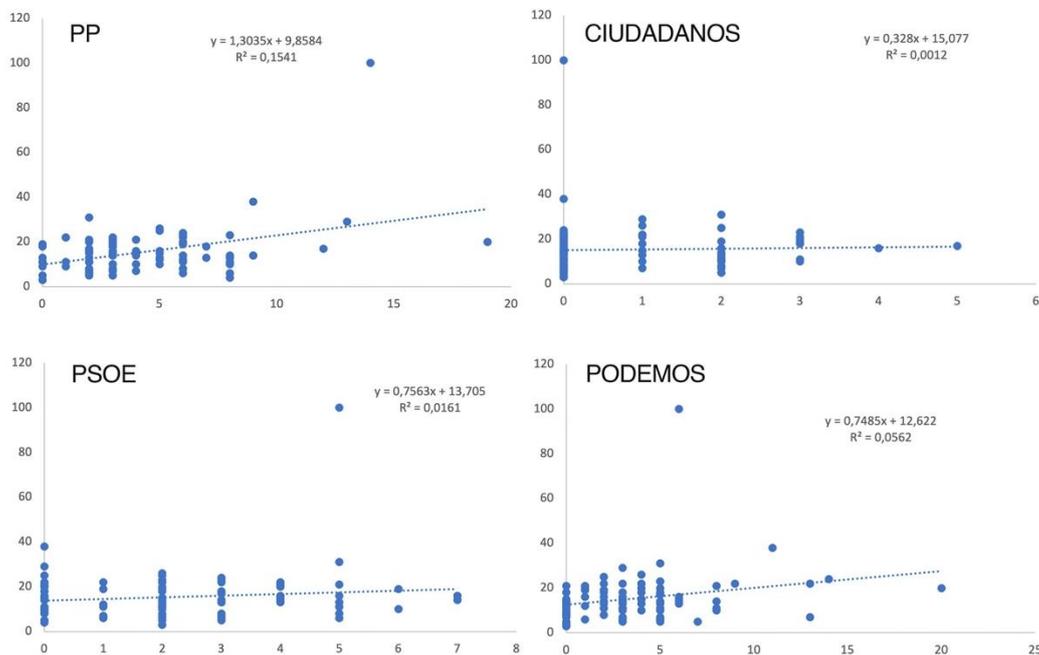
**Source:** Own elaboration

Next, we perform a statistical analysis (Figure 2 and Figure 3) to compare the most searched party on YouTube in both periods (Vox) with the rest of the parties. To assess the correlation between YouTube searches, we will perform several regression analyses. The results indicate that the closer  $R^2$  is to 1, the greater the correlation between the two analyzed variables. Conversely, the closer  $R^2$  is to 0, the lower the correlation.

The results of the regression analysis between the data from YouTube searches for "Vox" and "PP" in the historical period (2011 to 2021) indicate that  $R^2 = 0.51$  and that during the pandemic period  $R^2 = 0.15$ . When comparing the data from "Vox" with "PSOE", the results show  $R^2 = 0.05$  and  $R^2 = 0.02$ , in each of the analyzed periods, respectively. Between "Vox" and "Unidas Podemos" it was  $R^2 = 0.001$  and  $R^2 = 0.06$ , and between "Vox" and "Ciudadanos" it was  $R^2 = 0.03$  and  $R^2 = 0.001$ .

**Figure 3**

*Regression analysis between YouTube searches for "Vox" and the other political parties during the pandemic (from February 2020 to December 2021).*



**Source:** Own elaboration

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study reflect relevant data on the interest of Spanish citizens in searching for videos with political content on YouTube. In the first place, a boom is observed in the temporal chart of the so-called populist parties (Olivas, 2021; González Castro, 2021) in the middle of the analyzed decade. As of May 2015, the interest in Podemos is the most prominent and, however, at the end of the decade, between 2018 and 2019, a new political party burst in with such force that in a very short time it manages to tie in the global index of searches to the Partido Popular (PP) and Podemos. Likewise, the party of Santiago Abascal, Vox, is positioned in a very short time as the party that generates the most interest in searches on YouTube throughout the Spanish territory.

On the other hand, the data demonstrate a hegemony of the interest of Spaniards in the Vox party considered by several authors (Siscar, 2019; Hernández Conde and Fernández García, 2019; Espartero, 2019) to have a far-right ideology. On the other hand, Ciudadanos is the one with the least impact on YouTube in the analyzed periods. The PSOE, the party of the current president of the Spanish government, is in a very similar situation, with much lower data.

Vox reaches a maximum search peak in October 2020, a date that coincides with the motion of censure against the government of Pedro Sánchez for the management of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the motion did not have the support of any other parliamentary group (52 votes against 298), this fact seems to have helped Vox increase its popularity on YouTube.

The regression analyzes indicate that the parties that obtained a more correlative result were Vox and PP. This leads us to the conclusion that the citizens who were interested in the searches for both parties on YouTube did so in a more correlative way than with the other parties, whose results were much lower ( $R < 0.06$  in both periods). This also leads us to think that the two most active opposition parties, during the pandemic, had similar strategies that accentuated citizen searches more correlatively than with the other parties. Likewise, it stands out that both Vox and PP (conservative parties) were the ones that obtained the greatest interest in YouTube searches during the pandemic.

We conclude that current Spanish socio-political affairs have influenced the popularity of the political parties analyzed on YouTube and that the party that has taken the best advantage of this situation is Vox. Specifically, Santiago Abascal's party has been the most searched before and during the health crisis on YouTube. YouTube is, according to several studies (Reguillo, 2014; González Gómez, 2018; Fischer, 2018), one of the social networks most used by young people today. That Vox is the most sought-after party in recent years coincides with other studies (Siscar, 2019; Hernández Conde and Fernández García, 2019; Espartero, 2019) that relate the intention to vote of young Spaniards with Abascal's party and with populist speeches.

Likewise, the success of the popularity of Vox on YouTube is related to the idea of aestheticizing politics (Rancièrè, 2006; Rockhill and Watts, 2009; Ungureanu, 2015; Arceo, 2021) where the objective of political messages is to provoke a nice image of politicians that connects with consumers, an attractive image and speech that generates many searches. Something that today is related to audiovisual consumption on the multiscreen. Citizens are not only satisfied with watching television but also want feedback on this audiovisual content on other platforms, whose interlocutors (in many cases, YouTubers) seem to have no relationship with the interests of the big media (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Ferreira, 2019; Sampietro and Sánchez-Castillo, 2020). Something that, according to the data from this study, has benefited Vox over other parties.

Despite the results obtained, we want to highlight several limitations and/or possible avenues for future studies. We have not been able to identify if the searches carried out by citizens were positive or negative, that is if they were searches that improved or worsened the popularity of the analyzed parties. We also do not know if the videos consumed were humorous, fake news, informative, content from YouTubers, etc... It is also pending for future studies to examine other social networks such as Instagram or TikTok, to assess whether the data of interest in the searches of parties is similar to YouTube, or is it an exceptional case. This could tell us if there are social networks that are more prone to one political party or another.

Despite the limitations, we consider that this research can contribute to a better understanding of the evolution of the popularity of Spanish political parties in a social network as widespread as YouTube. And also, to understand that part of Vox's parliamentary success is based on the dissemination of messages in non-traditional media. Abascal's party, considered by some authors (Rinken, 2019; Ferreira, 2019;

Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Olivas, 2021; González Castro, 2021) as a populist party of the new extreme right, has become, according to the data analyzed in this article, the party that has gained the most popularity on YouTube before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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