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How the traumatic past influences the vote of the Populist Radical Right Parties in Germany, Poland and Spain

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Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs) often mobilize referring to the past. This aspect is not commonly included amongst the characteristic elements of these parties and, more importantly, we do not know much about the electoral returns of this strategy. In this article, we focus on three PRRPs – AfD in Germany, PiS in Poland and VOX in Spain – to argue that the conflicts of the past play a prominent role in their recent mobilizing strategies. By analysing comparative survey data gathered in early 2020 as part of the H2020 REPAST Project we show that opinions about the past that are in consonance with the parties' discourses have a positive influence on the support they get in elections. These effects are independent of other factors associated with populist voting, but they are contingent on the internal/external nature of the conflicts of the past that each of the parties appeals to. Our findings lead us to think that the use of the past is a key component of the electoral success of more parties of this kind.

Keywords: Populist Radical Right Parties, Electoral Behaviour, Uses of past, Survey analysis.

Word count: 7765 (+ Online Appendix 1063)

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Introduction

Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs)² often mobilize by referring to the past. Examples of this are found, for instance, in Berlusconi's construction of the myth of anti-Communism as the founding moment of the nation (Cento 2016, 220); or in Erdogan's revival of the Ottoman past (Kaya and Tecmen 2019, 361). In some cases, the past is seen by PRRPs with nostalgia (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018; Betz and Johnson 2004). We find examples in several countries such as Trump's "Make America Great Again", UKIP's "Take Back Control", the French National Front's "Remettre la France en ordre" (Lammers and Baldwin 2020, 944) or Erdogan's "Resurrection once again, rise once again" (Elçi 2021, 2). This phenomenon is finding a growing echo in recent literature (De Cesari, Bosilkov, and Piacentini 2020, 27; Kaya 2019; Manucci 2019) but we believe there is still great potential for contributions about the ideological characteristics of PRRPs .

Demand-side explanations of PRRPs' success usually focus on the economic grievances related to globalization and to the Great Recession (Kriesi et al. 2006; Hernández and Kriesi 2016) or on cultural factors such as anti-immigration and nativist attitudes (Ivarsflaten 2008) as the key drivers behind the support for these parties. More recent evidence points at the existence of a combination of both economic and cultural

² Populist Radical Right Parties are "political parties with a core ideology that is a combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism" (Mudde, 2007, 26). They represent a populist form of the radical right where nativism (a combination of nationalism and xenophobia), not populism, is the ultimate core feature (idem).

factors behind PRRPs' support (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020; Noury and Roland 2020). But, to the best of our knowledge, this article constitutes the first comparative analysis of the impact of attitudes related to conflicts of the past on populist radical right voting.

In the following lines, we will try to shed some light on this issue by focusing on three countries – Germany, Poland and Spain – where PRRPs could be obtaining electoral profit from their references to the conflicts of the past. We will first analyse the literature about the impact of the traumatic past on electoral behaviour, and more specifically, on the vote to PRRPs. Then, we will focus in more detail on the discourses of three of these parties: Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), and VOX. After presenting our hypotheses, we will introduce the data from the survey REPAST and the models that we will use to test them. Finally, based on our results, we conclude that the attitudes towards the conflicts of the past that are in line with the discourses of these PRRPs have a direct positive impact on their electoral results. Our findings suggest that the narrative about the past used by PRRPs is useful to mobilise their electorate and should be considered amongst the defining characteristics of these parties and their voters. More specifically, we show that in Germany and in Spain vote for AfD and VOX, respectively, is associated with the attribution of responsibility for the conflicts of the past to one of the sides (the “West” in the process of reunification of Germany, and the Republicans in the case of the Spanish civil war), while in Poland it is the feeling of national victimhood that fosters the vote for PiS.

The impact of the traumatic past on electoral behaviour today

The comparative literature about the impact of the traumatic past on voting nowadays has been growing in recent years (Wittenberg 2006; Acemoglu et al. 2011;

Tilley and Evans 2011; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017; Hoerner et al. 2019; Haffert 2020, Raimundo et al. 2021). Some of the mechanisms identified for this relationship are societal pessimism (Steenvoorden and Harteveld 2018), feelings of “nostalgia” (De Vries and Hoffmann 2018), or socialization under a non-democratic regime (Frantzeskakis and Yuko 2020). The works on the impact of the perceptions of the traumatic past on the vote to PRRPs are scarce, but there are a few instances in which there have been empirical attempts that focus on specific countries. This is the case of the vote of the “pieds-noirs” in France for the FN (Front National) (Comtat 2009; Savarese 2016, 179 ff); and of attitudes about the exhumation of Franco’s remains on the vote to VOX in Spain (Simón 2021, 16).

A key theoretical contribution is the one by Caramani and Manucci (2019), in which the authors suggest that the electoral fate of PRRPs depends on the kind of re-elaboration of the fascist past in a given country. By analysing secondary literature about eight cases in Western Europe, they classify four ways in which the past has been re-elaborated and reach the conclusion that the most favourable for PRRPs is when “the country fabricates victimhood of ‘external’ fascist regimes and denies responsibility” (this is the type they refer to as “victimisation”).³ On the contrary, when the country assumes total responsibility for the events (“culpabilisation”), or presents the country as the hero taking full merit for fighting fascism (“heroization”), PRRPs possibilities are limited. When the role of the country is not problematised, and there is little talk about it (“cancellation”), their fate is not clear (2019, 1164).

Our approach differs from Caramani and Manucci’s in that we focus on the demand side. More precisely, we analyse those attitudes that match the way in which PRRPs refer to the past. Secondly, we extend our analysis to conflicts of the past other

³ For another account of the relationship between victimhood and populism, see Al-Ghazzi (2021).

than fascist in Germany, Spain and Poland, being aware of the different histories of our cases of study and the importance of the national frames in mobilizing historical memory (Clarke 2014). In the case of Germany, we focus on the mobilization by AfD around the inequalities between the East and the West during the post-unification period from 1990 onwards. In the case of Poland, we focus on the anti-Communist discourse of PiS and their criticism of the communist elites of the Polish People's Republic since the end of the forties until 1989. In Spain, we analyse how VOX refers to the Spanish civil war that took place during the thirties, and to the dictatorship that followed. Finally, our approach also differs in the methodology we use. We try to show empirically through individual survey data that there is a link between the voters' perceptions of the traumatic past and voting for PRRPs.

The conflicts of the past in the discourses of AfD, PiS and VOX

Before moving on to the empirical analysis, in this section we will contextualize each of the cases by focusing on the discourse of each of the parties about the above-mentioned conflicts.

AfD in Germany

According to Caramani and Manucci the way in which the past has been re-elaborated in both West and East Germany decreases the probability of a successful PRRP in this country (2019, 1171). In West Germany, the logic of "culpabilisation", and in East Germany the logic of "heroization" – presenting itself as the opposition to fascism – reduce the opportunities to capitalize on the past (Manucci 2019, 124). However, this forecast has been proven wrong with the recent success of AfD. During the 2019 regional elections, AfD clearly politicized the division between the East and West and used the

term “second-class citizens” to appeal to the voters in the East (Deutsche Welle 2019; Hockenos 2019). With the slogan “let’s complete the change” the party referred to the events after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. It also appealed to the demonstrations that took place thirty years ago when calling on East German voters to “resist”, and to “complete the revolution” (Stelzenmüller 2019).

The reasons behind the increasing electoral success of AfD in the East have to do with socio-economic, political and cultural differences that translate into a feeling of grievance for the lack of representation and the attribution of stereotypes linked to the Communist period (Meyen and Rüdiger 2014; Kubiak 2019; Weisskircher 2020). Some authors have considered that this East-West division is as important as the memories about the Holocaust (Müller 2007 quoted in Beattie 2007, 3). What is even more interesting, the grievances about post-unification seem to interact with memories about the Holocaust. Due to the lack of a “public space for any process of coming to terms with a doubly burdening past” in the GDR, the memories of the Holocaust were dealt with differently in West and East (Habermas 2020, 40). Overall, the idea that Germans on both sides of the Berlin Wall needed to listen to each other’s’ stories and to embrace the divided past does not seem to have been accomplished (Beattie 2007, 7-8), and AfD is successful in exploiting the resentments related to this troublesome past.

PiS in Poland

Both the memory of World War II and of the Communist regime of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) has been present in the political discourse and in public sphere in Poland since the democratic transition of 1989. PiS – in government since 2015 – exploits the disturbed history by constantly referring to the past, and by offering a nostalgic vision of the country’s history invoking “a specific albeit totalizing mythology of the national past to gain control over the present, including its political aspect” (Kotwas

and Kubik 2019, 458). A substantial part of its discourse refers to how Poles were unilateral victims during World War II and the Holocaust and claims that any effort to shed light on the possible collaboration should be cancelled. PiS has also concentrated on tackling Communism and decommunizing the state. Historical grievances related to the Communist regime, but also to the subsequent democratic transition and to growing economic inequalities thereafter, are exploited in a crafty manner by PiS through a populist definition of a ‘network’ of privileged people of the ex-communist elite, business and media, that continued to run the country against the interests of the common people. One of the most prominent arguments used is that “Poland’s pacted transition was simply a compact between the communist-era nomenklatura and liberal Solidarity, with the former yielding power to the latter, in exchange for impunity for past crimes and opportunities for enrichment under the new regime” (Stanley and Czeński 2019, 73). Appeal to the memory of Communism is a powerful political resource used by PiS to turn the field of political competition into the field of identity, casting, on the one hand, political opponents as enemies complicit with the (post)communist state capture and, on the other, the narrators as country’s saviours (Korycki 2017).

Thus, PiS’s road to power was reliant on a Manichean simplification, reinterpretation and even denial of some aspects of Polish history in search for a ‘positive nostalgia for a guilt-free past’ that resonates with parts of Polish society (Göpffarth 2020). PiS’s narrative portraying Poles as the victims of history is not new. The myth of Poland as a martyr that suffers for other countries’ sins was quite extended during the nineteenth-century partitions and was also present in the culture of post-war Poland, characterized by the fusion of Catholic religion and national identity (Grzymała-Busse 2015). All those who think differently are labelled as enemies or, in the words of the party leader Jarosław Kaczyński, ‘Poles of second sort’. Thus, PiS is a perfect example of what Bernhard and

Kubik (2014, 4) call “mnemonic warriors” to refer to political actors that treat history instrumentally to construct a vision of the past legitimizing their effort to gain and hold power by drawing “a sharp line between themselves (the proprietors of the «true» version of the past) and other actors who cultivate «wrong» or «false» versions of history” (Kubik and Bernhard 2014, 17).

VOX in Spain

Until recently Spain was an exception, together with Portugal and Ireland, to the rise of PRRPs (Alonso and Rovira 2015). The legacy of Franco’s dictatorship, and the stigmatisation of the extreme-right, has often been offered as an argument to explain why no PRRP had been electorally successful in Spain (Ruiz 2017). However, the recent breakthrough of VOX has invalidated these arguments. VOX’s success can be partially explained by its references to the Spanish authoritarian past, especially since the general elections in April 2019. This party mobilises the memory of the past by associating Franco’s dictatorship to “better” and “glorious times”. It also presents itself as the representative of the “real Spain” in opposition to the “anti-Spain”, as Franco’s sympathizers referred to Republicans during the civil war (Rama et al. 2021, 230-232). Santiago Abascal, the party’s leader, recently went as far as to say that the PSOE-Unidas Podemos government was “the worst government of the last eighty years”, period that includes Franco’s dictatorship.

Given its somewhat nostalgic vision of Francoism, it does not come as a surprise that VOX radically opposes the law of historical memory promoted by the Socialist government in 2007. VOX is clearly more radical than the Popular Party – the main opposition party – when accusing the current leftist government coalition of imposing a biased interpretation about the civil war and the dictatorship (Sánchez Castrillo 2020). It

has been shown that the removal of Francoist street names by left-wing governments has contributed to an increase of electoral support for VOX (Villamil and Ballcells, 2021).

The party uses a double contradictory discourse about the past. On the one hand, it praises the value of the consensus reached during the transition to democracy and points at the risk of revisiting the past. This attitude is symbolised by its proposal for a ‘law of concord’ in the Andalusian parliament with the intention “to close definitively the wounds opened by the fratricidal conflict” (ABC Sevilla 2020). But, at the same time, its leaders make constant reference to the past marking a difference with the more discreet positions of the most other parties (González 2019).

Hypotheses

Considering that in all three cases these parties use the recent traumatic past in their discourses, our main objective is to test empirically whether this has an effect on the likelihood to vote for them. To do so, we focus on two specific aspects of the past: the attribution of responsibility for the conflict to one of the sides, and the feeling of national victimhood. Regarding the first one, in all three cases PRRPs politicize the division between the sides of the conflicts. In the case of Germany and Spain these are internal divisions, with AfD emphasizing East/West divide and VOX evoking the division between the “Republican” and the so-called “National” sides of the civil war. In Poland, although blame attribution might be blurred by the fact that the Communist regime was imposed in the post-war arrangements by the Soviet Union, PiS appeals to the memory of Communism to divide Poles into two camps: the successors of the Communists and their accomplices in the post-Communist state capture vs. the ‘true’ anti-Communist.⁴

⁴ This is not to say this is the only division important for explaining party competition in Poland. A divide between the so-called “social solidarity” and “liberal” camps has also been structuring Polish politics for some time now and it can be related to the anti-elite dimension of populist voting (Czeńnik and Kotnarowski 2011). Nevertheless, regarding the politics of memory as the subject of this article, arguably, it is still the post-Communist and post-Solidarity division that stands out as the crucial one.

We expect that blaming the same side of the conflict as PRRPs do will attract the vote for them. Therefore, our first hypothesis would be that:

H1. Citizens with attitudes in consonance with AfD, VOX and PiS one-sided attribution of responsibility for the conflicts of the past will be more likely to vote for these parties regardless of other factors.

Secondly, in the case of Poland, we expect that PiS voters will be attracted by its reinforcement of the feeling of national victimhood. Following Caramani and Manucci, the way PiS refers to the past follows the “victimisation” type that blames ‘external’ forces (2019, 1165). In the cases of Germany and Spain, because the conflicts were internal and divided the population we do not expect a feeling of “national victimhood” to foster the support for AfD and VOX. Consistently, our second hypothesis would be that:

H2. A feeling of national victimhood increases the likelihood of supporting PiS.

Citizens’ attitudes about conflicts of the past and vote for the Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs)

In order to test our hypotheses, we have analysed survey data produced within the framework of the REPAST H2020 project⁵ to assess the relationship between the attitudes towards the past and PRRP voting in Germany, Poland, and Spain. The three countries are witnesses to an increasing electoral success of Populist Radical Right Parties. AfD won more than 10% of the vote in the last federal elections in 2021, PiS is in government since 2015 and it gathered nearly 44% of the vote in the 2019 elections and Vox obtained

⁵ The full name of the project is “Strengthening European integration through the analysis of conflict discourses: revisiting the past, anticipating the future”.

15% of the vote in the general elections in 2019. All these parties refer to conflicts that their countries have experienced in the recent past in order to gain electoral success. Despite the differences between their trajectories and the past conflicts they try to capitalise on, these three parties share the characteristic of being electorally successful PRRPs. This feature also has practical consequences when performing a comparative study based on survey data.⁶ The data collection has been carried out online in Germany and Poland and using a mixed survey method (online and telephone surveys) in Spain. The samples are representative of the national populations and have been refined with post-stratification weights. We have designed a statistical model based on a binary logistic regression for each country where the dependent variable measures whether a person has voted in the last parliamentary elections for AfD, VOX, PiS, respectively, or for other parties.⁸

Our key independent variables are attitudes towards the conflicts of the past (post-unification in Germany, the People's Republic of Poland, and the Spanish civil war). The first variable measures from -10 to +10 to what extent the voters attribute the responsibility over the conflict to one of the sides of the conflict. The positive values indicate that the responsibility lies more on West Germans, the Communists in Poland

⁶ The survey was carried out also in other countries: Bosnia Herzegovina, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, the UK (Northern Ireland) and Kosovo. However, only in Germany, Poland and Spain the number of PRRP voters is large enough to conduct a meaningful analysis. The samples were 1005 respondents in Germany, 1003 in Poland and 1000 in Spain. In the final models these were reduced to 598, 627, and 571, respectively, due to the missing cases (mainly on the dependent variable). In the full sample, supporters of Vox represent roughly a 9.1 percent of the sample, AfD voters make 14.7, and there are 34.7 supporters of PiS. Without missing cases, these numbers are: 9.3, 16.4 and 30.8.

⁸ These two categories were coded 1 and 0 respectively. Abstainers, those who do not know, and those who don't answer the question, are omitted from the analysis. In the case of Poland, we focus exclusively on PiS, although Kukiz'15 is also classified as PRRP by most scholars (Rooduijn et al. 2020). Kukiz'15 lost most of the anti-establishment appeal it had in the 2015 elections when in 2019 it joined the Polish Coalition (Koalicja Polska) with the traditional right-wing agrarian Polish Peasant Party. In any case, the survey included only 32 respondents that declared having voted for Kukiz'15, and we decided to drop them out of the analysis for the sake of clarity. We have replicated the analyses after removing the voters of left-wing parties such as Podemos and En Comu Podem in Spain, and the results are robust to excluding those parties (see Table A3 in the Online Appendix).

and the Republicans in Spain than East Germans, Anti-Communists, and the so-called “Nationals”). 0 means that, according to the respondent, the two sides have the same level of responsibility for the conflict. The second variable measures the feeling of national victimhood through the agreement with the statement “People in [country] have suffered historically more than people in other countries”. The degree of agreement is measured with a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means that the respondent completely disagrees with the statement and 5 that she completely agrees.

The following control variables are included in the regression models to make sure that the impact of the attitudes towards the past is independent of other factors associated with PRRPs’ voting as tested in previous research: age, gender, education, habitat size, unemployment, ideology, Euroscepticism, anti-immigration, authoritarianism, national pride, and populist attitudes related to people-centrism, Manicheism and anti-elitism (Stockemer, Lentz, and Mayer 2018; Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers 2013; Mudde 2007; Ivarsflaten 2008; Castanho Silva et al. 2020; Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove 2014).⁹

Results

Table 1 shows the coefficients of three binary logistic regressions where the dependent variable is having voted in the last parliamentary elections for AfD, VOX or PiS (versus other parties) in columns 1, 2 and 3, respectively. Regarding the key independent variables related to the memories of the past, in the first place, we find that blame attribution to one side of the past conflict is a significant factor predicting PRRPs’ voting in Germany and in Spain. Even when controlling for a variety of factors associated

⁹ See Table A1 the Appendix for descriptive statistics and coding of all variables.

with PRRPs' support, the past matters. As shown in Figure 1, the probability of voting for AfD and VOX increases respectively among those who attribute responsibility for the divisions after the reunification to West Germans, and to Republicans for the Spanish civil war. The likelihood of supporting AfD for those who attribute the blame for the divisions after 1989 only to East Germans is 11.9 percent, for those who deem both East and West Germans equally responsible it is 18.4 percent, and for those who put all of the blame on West Germany, 26.9 percent.¹⁰ Analogously, in the case of predicted support for VOX in Spain, it grows from 3.8 percent among those who fully blame the so-called "Nationals" for the civil war, to 8.7 percent among those who think that both sides are equally responsible, and to 17.3 percent for those who blame only the Republicans. This is a clear indication that voters' attitudes about the past are a defining aspect of support for these two parties.

(Table 1 here)

(Figure 1 here)

However, our results also point towards the fact that the history and the characteristics of the conflicts in each country are difficult to capture with a highly standardized instrument such as a cross-national survey. We find that in Poland there is no impact on support of PiS of blame attribution for the period of the People's Republic of Poland. The main reason for this is the scarce variability in the answers to this question: as shown by the bottom panel of Figure 1, the distribution of attribution of responsibility in Poland is heavily skewed to the Communist side. Importantly, this is true for voters of all main parties in Poland (see Figure A1 in the Appendix), a country with very weak Communist successor parties and leftist parties. This is unsurprising given that the

¹⁰ It could be argued that this variable operates distinctively in East and West Germany. Including a control for East Germany and an interaction term with blame attribution do not alter these results substantially.

Communist regime is treated by most Poles as an imposition from abroad (the USSR). In other words, in some countries the very nature of the conflict (internal and external) allows the population to blame an external enemy and overlook internal divisions over the past. Hence, hypothesis 1 finds proof only in the case of Germany and Spain.

Secondly, the feeling of national victimhood – that is, agreement with the statement that the country in question has suffered more in history than other nations (see Figure A2 in the Appendix for its distribution by parties) – is a positive and significant predictor of support for PRRPs only in the case of Poland. This finding confirms hypothesis 2 and, once again, points to the importance of the nature of the conflict of the past. If it is internal (like the German post-unification or Spanish civil war) feeling of victimhood is associated rather to one side of the conflict and, thus, it is blame attribution to the ‘enemy’ that fosters support for PRRPs. On the other hand, if there is an external conflict as well (such as the People’s Republic of Poland), a feeling of national victimhood boosts PRRPs’ vote.¹¹

Before discussing these results further in the conclusions, let us comment some interesting results related to the control variables. Our analysis confirms that PRRPs are attractive for younger voters. This is the case after controlling for a variety of other factors related to the support of older generations for these parties. However, our results show that, as the electoral support of these parties has grown in recent elections, it has extended to different groups of the population and, therefore, their electorate has become more heterogeneous. This might explain why we do not find a significant general effect of

¹¹ Additionally, as Table A2 in the Online Appendix shows, the effects of the main independent variables are consistent independently of the inclusion of controls – at least in the case of VOX and PiS (see models 5-12). With AfD, the effect of one-sided responsibility becomes significant only in the full model. This puts some constraint on the findings for Germany and more research is needed to elucidate the relationship between attitudes toward the responsibility for the post-unification conflict, populist attitudes and voting for AfD. Importantly, not excluding missing observations in the models with less controls (up to 714 observations in Germany, 720 in Spain and 750 in Poland) render the same results for the key independent variables’ effects (results available upon request).

education (only in Poland), or of being unemployed. Unsurprisingly, the results also show that those with a right-wing ideology are more prone to support these parties. Holding Eurosceptic attitudes also contributes to the support of AfD and VOX.¹² We find that the voters of the three parties are very reluctant to accept Muslim immigrants, although slightly less so in the case of VOX (they accept them albeit with restrictions).¹³ This finding is in line with previous research showing the link between nativism and support for PRRPs. The impact of support for authoritarianism is confirmed in Poland and national pride is a significant predictor of voting for VOX and PiS, confirming the strong nationalist character of these parties.

Finally, also populist attitudes have an impact on the support for these parties. However, they seem to be acting distinctively in each case. For AfD, it is voters with attitudes showing people-centrism and a Manichean outlook that feel attracted by it. In the case of PiS, it is basically people-centrism that has a positive impact. However, we did not find any significant effect of populist attitudes in Spain, confirming the idea that VOX is somewhat less populist than PRRPs from other countries (Ferreira 2019).¹⁴ The case of Poland shows an additional peculiarity: anti-elitism hinders the probability to support PiS. This makes sense, given that the populist party in question has been in government since 2015 (which puts some constraint on this analysis, as incumbency

¹² The evaluation of EU membership is a variable that measures attitudes towards the EU through the perception of benefits brought by the EU. Given that in Poland the material benefits are still direct and very large, this result is not inconsistent with the strong effects of Euroscepticism and detachment from Europe on PRRP voting in this country found elsewhere (Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020).

¹³ Although previous work has emphasized nativism as a characteristic of VOX (Ferreira 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte et al. 2020; among others), it is not clear empirically if concerns over immigration are a determining factor in the Vox vote. While Turnbull-Dugarte (2019) finds no association between concerns over immigration and voting for VOX, Dennison and Medes (2019) show that individuals point to Vox's rhetoric on immigration as the most commonly stated motivation for voting for the party.

¹⁴ Ferreira (2019) considers that VOX does not fit well the PRRP category given that its most preeminent rhetoric is nationalist rather than populist. We follow other scholars, who, following Mudde (2007), do classify it as PRRP due to its nativist and authoritarian discourse (Rooduijn et al. 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte et al. 2020).

status is a relevant variable in meaningful comparisons of PRRP voters). Supporters of parties in government evidently will be less likely to think that “the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves” compared to supporters of challenger parties.

Conclusion

While much has been written about the electoral success of PRRPs, the political use of the past as a defining characteristic of these parties has been underexplored by the literature so far¹⁵. In this article, we have shown how AfD in Germany, PiS in Poland, and VOX in Spain refer explicitly to the conflicts of the past to mobilize around these divisions. This dimension of their discourse helps them build an idea of the nation, heartland or the people, of great importance to populist parties. Nostalgia of the past has been identified as a characteristic of these parties (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018; Betz and Johnson 2004). As we have seen, references to the past are not always nostalgic, but may also refer to antagonistic aspects as to who was (is) to blame for historical traumatic events. The use of this kind of narratives deserves greater consideration when identifying the defining features of PRRPs.

Besides the focus on the supply side (PRRPs discourses about conflicts of the past), we have turned our attention to the demand side (voters’ attitudes towards those conflicts), which is a much less studied phenomenon. More specifically, we have shown that in all three countries the attitudes towards traumatic pasts that are in line with the discourses of PRRPs exert a positive influence on the likelihood to vote for them. This effect depends on the nature of the conflict: if the conflict is internal, the mechanism that

¹⁵ A recent exception is Couperus, Tortola and Rensmann (2022).

explains support is blame attribution to the “other” side; if the conflict involves an external actor, it is the feeling of national victimhood that increases the likelihood to vote for the PRRP. We have confirmed that the effect of voters’ perceptions is statistically significant even after taking into account other factors associated with voting for PRRPs according to previous literature. Our results show that there are other cultural factors that explain the demand for this kind of parties besides nostalgia, nativism, and authoritarianism. In sum, the *past matters* and the *reactivation of divisions* of the recent past seems to be electorally profitable for PRRPs.

One of the main challenges we have encountered is the comparative analysis of attitudes towards the conflicts of the past, as the standardisation of questions seems inimical to the historical specificities of each case. This was an especially delicate issue as we extended the analysis to conflicts other than the fascist past by focusing on the German unification, Communist Poland and the Spanish Civil War. Surveys addressing perceptions towards the past are very scarce but our results indicate that this methodology can contribute, in combination with others, to promising theoretical advances.

Finally, we would like to point at some aspects related to the match between attitudes towards past conflicts and vote for PRRPs that seem worth exploring further in comparative perspective. One of these is whether there are specific contexts in which that match between supply and demand is more likely (Raimundo and Santana-Pereira, 2021). Also, in line with the literature on party polarization, it remains to be seen to what extent those attitudes are the result, instead of the driver, of vote for PRRPs. In other words, are voters changing their electoral choices because they find parties that come closer to their political preferences, or are these parties changing voters’ minds about the conflicts of the past? (Layman and Carsey, 2006). A third interesting line of research that derives from our results has to do with the role of the conflicts of the past in relation to other nativist

aspects of PRRPs. As some authors have recently pointed out, references to the past may be offering a continuity line, and reinforcing the construction of other antagonistic cultural divisions between “us” and “them” in PRRPs discourses (Bull and Hansen, 2016:1-2; Esteve Del Valle and Costa López, 2022).

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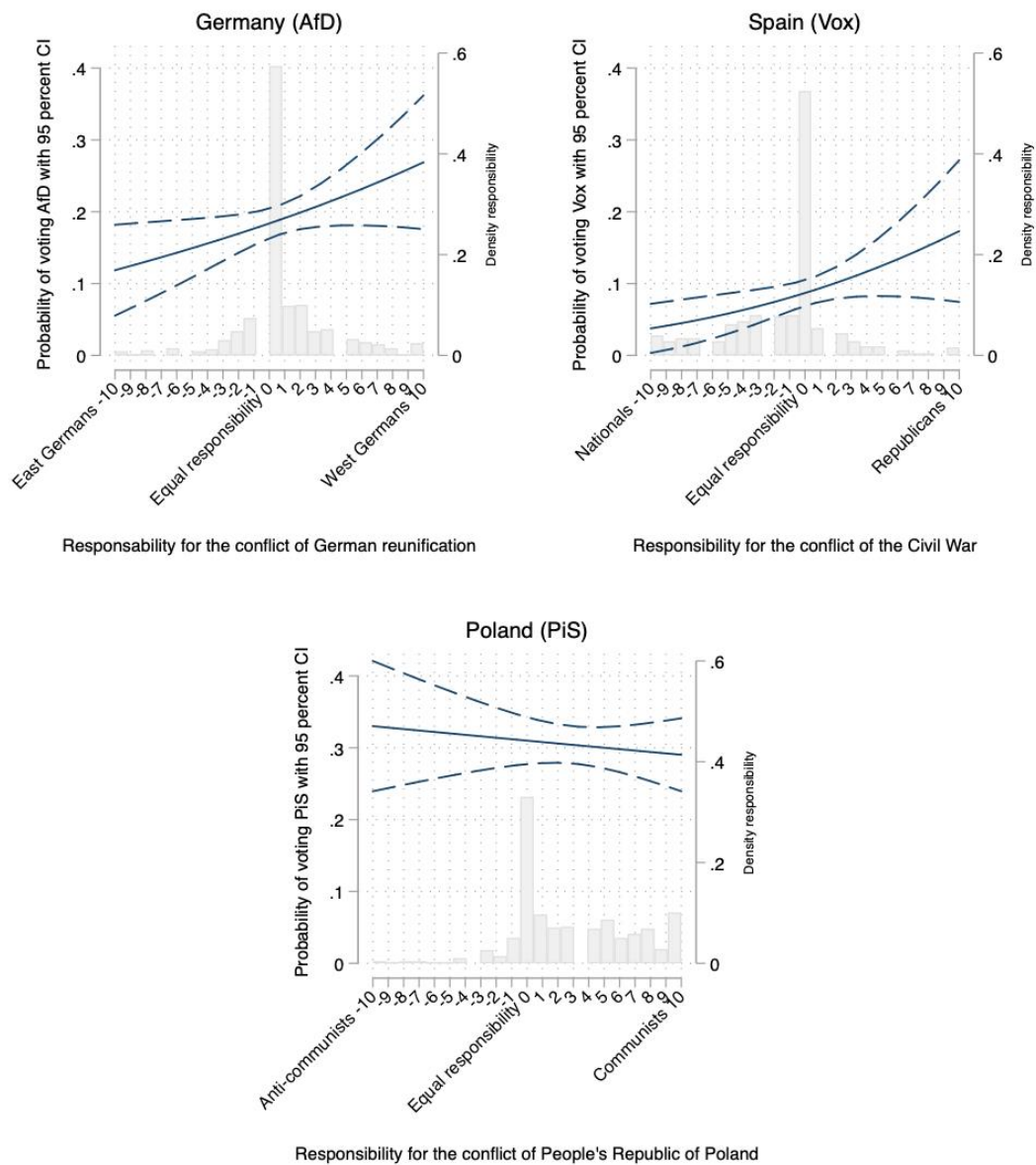
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Table 1. Vote for AfD (Germany), VOX (Spain), and PiS (Poland)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	AfD	VOX	PiS
Age	-0.03**	-0.03*	-0.01+
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Female	-0.07	-0.52	0.28
	(0.37)	(0.41)	(0.27)
University education	-0.30	-0.38	-0.56*
	(0.45)	(0.39)	(0.26)
Habitat size	-0.11	0.04	-0.17**
	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Unemployed	-0.08	-0.26	0.00
	(0.74)	(0.53)	(.)
L-R ideology self-placement	1.25***	1.06***	0.95***
	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.12)
Positive evaluation of EU membership	-2.28***	-0.84+	-0.24
	(0.37)	(0.43)	(0.38)
Attitudes towards Muslim migrants (<i>ref. Be accepted without restrictions</i>)			
- Be accepted but with restrictions	0.31	1.60*	0.62
	(0.45)	(0.69)	(0.49)
- Not be accepted	1.87**	1.17	1.76**
	(0.65)	(0.86)	(0.56)
Support for authoritarianism (<i>ref. Democracy is always preferable</i>)			
- Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic system	0.04	-0.01	0.10
	(0.42)	(0.61)	(0.35)
- For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or authoritarian regime	0.94	1.10	0.96+
	(0.63)	(0.81)	(0.58)
National pride	0.65	0.84+	0.68*
	(0.42)	(0.45)	(0.27)
People-centrism	1.32***	-0.54	0.65*
	(0.37)	(0.48)	(0.29)
Anti-elitism	-0.13	0.50	-1.20***
	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.29)
Manicheism	1.61***	0.92	0.20
	(0.47)	(0.56)	(0.38)
One-sided responsibility for the conflict	0.12*	0.13*	-0.02
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.03)
National victimhood	0.06	-0.17	0.76**
	(0.38)	(0.44)	(0.29)
Constant	-5.47***	-6.72***	-4.54***
	(1.34)	(1.47)	(1.01)
Observations	598	627	571
Pseudo R^2	0.573	0.426	0.460
Log lik.	-120.97	-110.92	-190.03

Source: Own elaboration based on REPAST Survey. Notes: Coefficients of logistic regression models with vote for other parties as reference. Standard errors in parentheses; + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 1. Marginal effects of one-sided responsibility for the historical conflict on voting for AfD, VOX and PiS



Source: own elaboration based on REPAST Survey. Marginal effects of the coefficients from models 1-3 in Table 1.

Online Appendix

Table A1. Descriptive statistics of all variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Obs.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
PRRPs' vote	2,232	0.20	0.40	0	1
Age	3,008	48.59	16.31	18	98
Gender	3,008	0.52	0.50	0	1
Education	3,008	0.42	0.49	0	1
Habitat size	3,008	5.49	2.78	1	11
Unemployed	3,008	0.05	0.21	0	1
L-R ideology self-placement	2,627	3.73	1.35	1	7
Positive evaluation of EU membership	2,917	0.71	0.45	0	1
Attitudes towards Muslim migrants	2,847	1.85	0.62	1	3
Support for authoritarianism	2,766	1.36	0.63	1	3
National pride	2,915	0.38	0.49	0	1
People-centrism	2,886	0.47	0.50	0	1
Anti-elitism	2,835	0.42	0.49	0	1
Manicheism	2,836	0.14	0.35	0	1
One-sided responsibility for the conflict	3,004	0.59	3.63	-10	10
National victimhood	2,901	0.38	0.49	0	1

Source: REPAST Survey. *Notes:* Age is a continuous measure, gender (1=female), education (1=University), habitat size (11-point scale running from under 1,000 to over 2 million), unemployment (1=unemployed). Placement on the left-right scale (1=extreme left; 7=radical extreme right), evaluation of EU membership (1=a good thing for the country), attitudes toward Muslim migrants (1=should be accepted without restrictions; 2=should be accepted but with restrictions; 3=should not be accepted), support for authoritarianism (1=democracy is always preferable; 2=under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic system; 3=for people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or authoritarian regime), national pride (1=very proud of the nation), and measures of three populist attitudes: people-centrism (1=strongly agree that "The will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's politics"), anti-elitism (1=strongly agree that "The government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves") and Manicheism (1=strongly agree that "I can understand people who stop talking to a friend because of their political opinions").

Table A2. Vote for AfD (Germany), VOX (Spain), and PiS (Poland)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	AfD				VOX				PiS			
One-sided responsibility for the conflict	-0.00	0.01	0.08	0.12*	0.30***	0.30***	0.13*	0.13*	0.06*	0.09**	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
National victimhood	0.80**	0.72*	0.17	0.06	-0.07	-0.24	-0.08	-0.17	1.39***	1.26***	0.80**	0.76**
	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.37)	(0.38)	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.42)	(0.44)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.29)	(0.29)
Age		-0.02*	-0.03*	-0.03**		-0.01	-0.03*	-0.03*		-0.02**	-0.01	-0.01+
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Female		-0.61*	-0.10	-0.07		-0.72*	-0.47	-0.52		0.09	0.32	0.28
		(0.27)	(0.35)	(0.37)		(0.32)	(0.39)	(0.41)		(0.20)	(0.26)	(0.27)
University education		-1.11**	-0.80+	-0.30		-0.40	-0.40	-0.38		-0.72***	-0.63*	-0.56*
		(0.36)	(0.44)	(0.45)		(0.32)	(0.39)	(0.39)		(0.20)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Habitat size		-0.07	-0.08	-0.11		0.02	0.02	0.04		-0.13**	-0.17**	-0.17**
		(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.08)		(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)		(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Unemployed		-0.18	-0.31	-0.08		0.06	-0.13	-0.26		0.00	0.00	0.00
		(0.78)	(1.01)	(0.74)		(0.55)	(0.54)	(0.53)		(.)	(.)	(.)
L-R ideology self-placement			1.24***	1.25***			1.05***	1.06***			1.01***	0.95***
			(0.24)	(0.24)			(0.20)	(0.21)			(0.12)	(0.12)
Positive evaluation of EU membership			-2.04***	-2.28***			-0.75+	-0.84+			-0.17	-0.24
			(0.33)	(0.37)			(0.42)	(0.43)			(0.38)	(0.38)
Attitudes towards Muslim migrants (ref. Be accepted without restrictions)												
- Be accepted but with restrictions			0.58	0.31			1.54*	1.60*			0.58	0.62
			(0.42)	(0.45)			(0.68)	(0.69)			(0.48)	(0.49)
- Not be accepted			2.00**	1.87**			1.11	1.17			1.63**	1.76**
			(0.62)	(0.65)			(0.84)	(0.86)			(0.56)	(0.56)
Support for authoritarianism (ref. Democracy is always preferable)												
- Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic system			-0.15	0.04			0.10	-0.01			0.02	0.10
			(0.41)	(0.42)			(0.56)	(0.61)			(0.33)	(0.35)
- For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or authoritarian regime			0.50	0.94			1.24	1.10			0.91	0.96+
			(0.56)	(0.63)			(0.77)	(0.81)			(0.60)	(0.58)
National pride			0.66+	0.65			0.89*	0.84+			0.67**	0.68*
			(0.37)	(0.42)			(0.45)	(0.45)			(0.25)	(0.27)
People-centrism				1.32***				-0.54				0.65*
				(0.37)				(0.48)				(0.29)
Anti-elitism				-0.13				0.50				-1.20***
				(0.38)				(0.38)				(0.29)
Manicheism				1.61***				0.92				0.20
				(0.47)				(0.56)				(0.38)
Constant	-1.74***	0.14	-4.84**	-5.47***	-2.23***	-1.11+	-6.45***	-6.72***	-1.95***	0.04	-5.05***	-4.54***
	(0.19)	(0.63)	(1.48)	(1.34)	(0.18)	(0.60)	(1.45)	(1.47)	(0.20)	(0.47)	(1.03)	(1.01)
Observations	598	598	598	598	627	627	627	627	574	571	571	571
Pseudo R ²	0.023	0.083	0.518	0.573	0.130	0.154	0.415	0.426	0.079	0.136	0.432	0.460
Log lik.	-276.61	-259.62	-136.49	-120.97	-168.28	-163.68	-113.21	-110.92	-327.36	-304.07	-200.01	-190.03

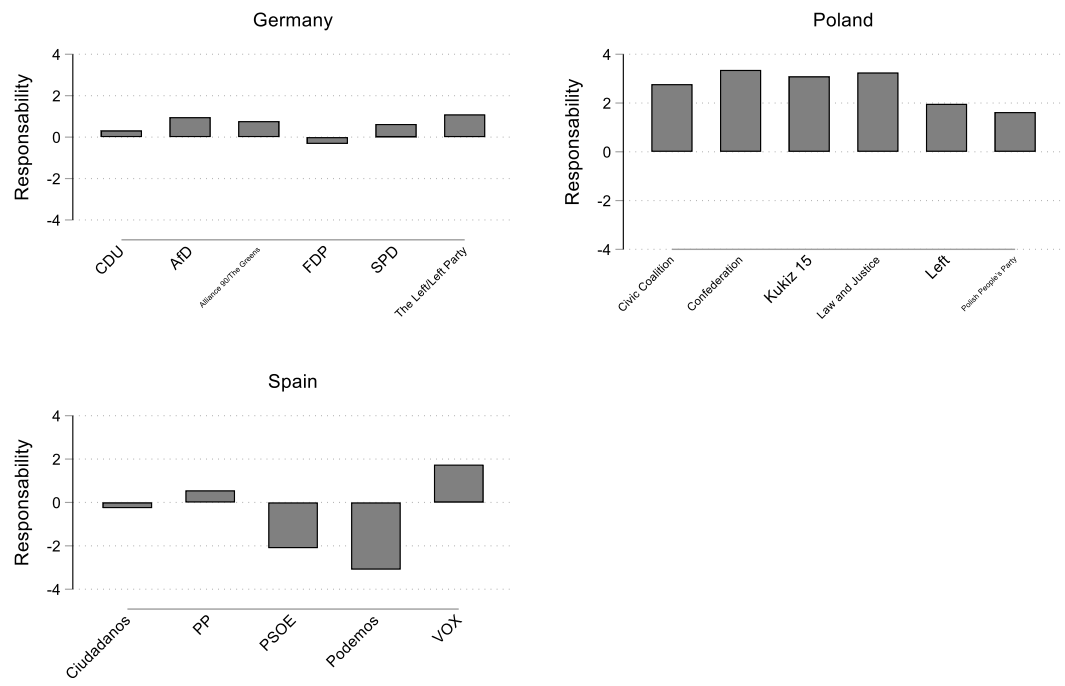
Source: Own elaboration based on REPASt Survey. Notes: Coefficients of logistic regression models with vote for other parties as reference. Standard errors in parentheses; + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table A3. Vote for VOX (Spain) leaving populist left parties (Unidas Podemos and En Comú Podem) out of the analysis

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	VOX			
One-sided responsibility for the conflict	0.29***	0.29***	0.14*	0.13*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
National victimhood	-0.04	-0.25	-0.08	-0.18
	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.42)	(0.44)
Age		-0.02*	-0.03*	-0.03*
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Female		-0.75*	-0.48	-0.54
		(0.33)	(0.39)	(0.41)
University education		-0.47	-0.42	-0.41
		(0.32)	(0.39)	(0.39)
Habitat size		0.01	0.01	0.03
		(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Unemployed		0.29	-0.04	-0.16
		(0.57)	(0.56)	(0.55)
L-R ideology self-placement			1.00***	1.00***
			(0.21)	(0.22)
Positive evaluation of EU membership			-0.77+	-0.87*
			(0.42)	(0.42)
Attitudes towards Muslim migrants (<i>ref. Be accepted without restrictions</i>)				
- Be accepted but with restrictions			1.48*	1.54*
			(0.68)	(0.70)
- Not be accepted			1.06	1.11
			(0.84)	(0.87)
Support for authoritarianism (<i>ref. Democracy is always preferable</i>)				
- Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic system			0.09	-0.05
			(0.56)	(0.59)
- For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or authoritarian regime			1.37+	1.20
			(0.83)	(0.87)
National pride			0.90+	0.83+
			(0.46)	(0.46)
People-centrism				-0.57
				(0.47)
Anti-elitism				0.50
				(0.38)
Manicheism				0.97+
				(0.55)
Constant	-2.10***	-0.50	-5.97***	-6.16***
	(0.19)	(0.62)	(1.56)	(1.59)
Observations	530	530	530	530
Pseudo R^2	0.118	0.152	0.387	0.400
Log lik.	-161.48	-155.28	-112.15	-109.74

Source: Own elaboration based on REPAST Survey. Notes: Coefficients of logistic regression models with vote for other parties as reference. Standard errors in parentheses; + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

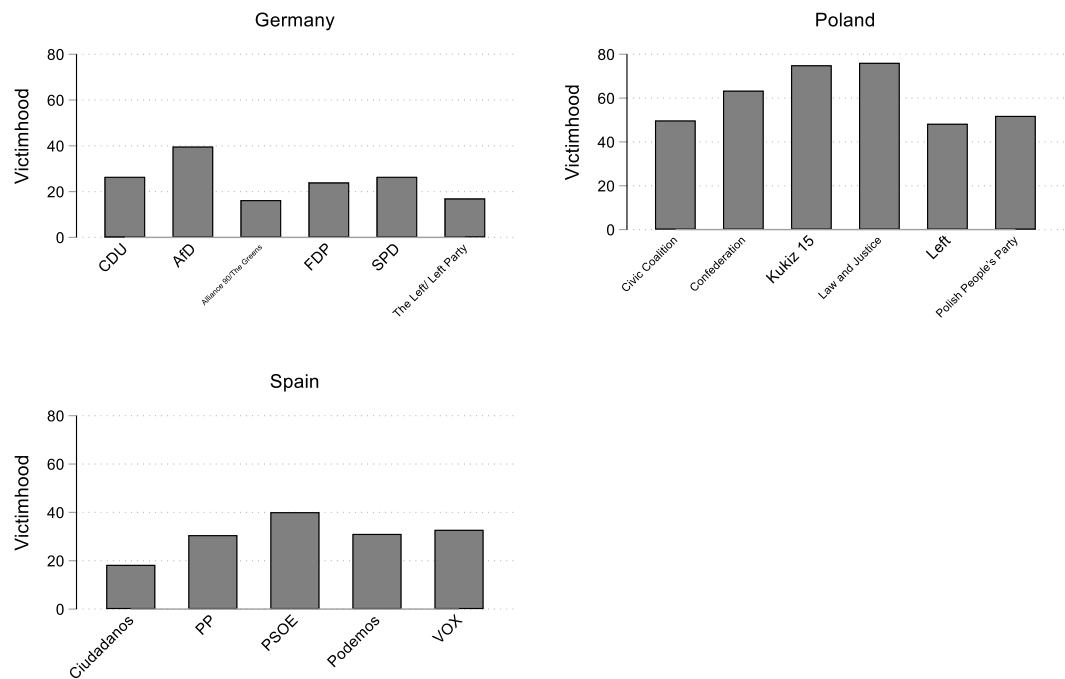
Figure A1. One-sided responsibility for the historical conflict in Germany, Poland and Spain by vote to political parties.



Source: Own elaboration based on REPAST Survey

Note: The bars reflect the subtraction of responsibility of one side from the other. See footnote 6.

Figure A2. Feeling of National Victimhood in Germany, Poland and Spain by political parties (percentages).



Source: Own elaboration based on REPAST Survey