

Disputing the Past, Remaking the Present. The Radical Right and the Battlefield of History Education in Spain and Portugal (2019-2025)

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The article explores how the radical right in Spain (Vox) and Portugal (Chega) has instrumentalised history and history education between 2019 and 2025 to promote nationalist narratives and challenge democratic historical discourse. It shows how both parties seek to reconstruct a glorified national past while downplaying episodes of colonial violence, dictatorship, and civil conflict. By accusing the educational system of spreading "leftist" or "woke" ideologies, they advocate for a more "patriotic" reinterpretation rooted in traditional and religious values. Vox frames Spanish history through events such as the *Reconquista* and the Spanish Empire to reinforce unity. In contrast, Chega invokes nostalgia for the *Estado Novo* [New State] and the colonial empire to support exclusionary identity politics. Both parties reject professional historiography, promoting a populist freedom to reinterpret history, often through digital media. The article concludes that history has become a battleground where emotionally charged, politically motivated narratives challenge factual analysis. While curricular changes remain limited, the symbolic influence of these parties is growing, posing an epistemic threat to the integrity of history education and democratic pluralism.
Keywords: uses of history; history teaching; history education; radical right; Iberian countries.

Contestando o passado, reinventando o presente. A direita radical e o campo de batalha do ensino da história em Espanha e Portugal (2019-2025)

O artigo explora como a direita radical em Espanha (Vox) e em Portugal (Chega) instrumentalizou a história e o ensino da história entre 2019 e 2025 para promover narrativas nacionalistas e desafiar o discurso histórico democrático. Mostra como ambos os partidos procuram reconstruir um passado nacional

glorificado, minimizando episódios de violência colonial, de ditadura e de guerra civil. Ao acusarem o sistema educativo de disseminar ideologias "esquerdistas" ou "woke", defendem uma reinterpretação mais "patriótica", enraizada em valores tradicionais e religiosos. O Vox enquadra a história espanhola por meio de eventos como a *Reconquista* e o Império Espanhol para reforçar a unidade, enquanto o Chega invoca a nostalgia pelo Estado Novo e pelo império colonial para apoiar políticas identitárias excludentes. Ambos os partidos rejeitam a historiografia profissional, promovendo uma liberdade populista para reinterpretar a história, muitas vezes através dos meios digitais. O artigo conclui que a história se tornou um campo de batalha em que a análise factual é desafiada por narrativas carregadas de emoção e de motivação política. Embora as mudanças curriculares continuem limitadas, a influência simbólica destes partidos está a crescer, representando uma ameaça epistémica à integridade do ensino da história e ao pluralismo democrático.
Palavras-chave: usos da história; ensino da história; educação histórica; direita radical; países ibéricos.

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Introduction

In recent years, the radical right[1] in Spain and Portugal has actively sought to reframe national narratives across institutional, media, and

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1 There is a debate in the social sciences regarding how to label the political forces that have emerged to the right of traditional conservative parties since the late 20th century. Without attempting a detailed analysis of this debate, some scholars prefer to refer to them as the "far right", as Beatriz Acha, *Analizar el auge de la ultraderecha. Surgimiento, ideología y ascenso de los nuevos partidos de ultraderecha* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2021), 57-58, or "extreme right 2.0" – Steven Forti, *Extrema derecha 2.0. Qué es y cómo combartirla* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2021), 83-86 – given their complex relationship with democracy. Cas Mudde also accepts this definition of the far right for this political sphere, although he distinguishes between the extreme right and the radical right within it, based on their hostility toward democracy: the former being anti-system, while the latter accepts the essence of democracy, albeit questioning some of its essential elements – Cas Mudde, *La ultraderecha hoy* (Barcelona: Paidos, 2021), 24-25. This text does not aim to take sides in this important debate, nor does it seek to downplay its implications for democracy, but in order to distinguish the two parties analysed from other extreme right or neo-Nazi organizations existing in both countries, the term "radical right" has been chosen.

educational spheres, attempting to reconfigure interpretations of national history. In this way, history and history education have become a strategic battleground for political, symbolic, and identity-based disputes. This article presents an analysis of how the new radical right in both Iberian countries has instrumentalised history between 2019 and 2025, with particular attention to controversies surrounding school and the public role of cultural actors in shaping citizens' historical consciousness.[2] In Spain, the analysis centres on Vox's role in legislative debates on education and historical memory, as well as its broader online and cultural discourse. In Portugal, the focus lies on Chega's [Enough] use of parliamentary discourse and media interventions to legitimise a revisionist agenda concerning the national past.

Despite differences in national contexts, several shared features can be identified in the radical right's engagement with the past. In both cases, these actors construct what can be described as a parallel past composed of great *tableaux*: an alternative historical narrative that selectively reorders temporal hierarchies, silences structural violence, and privileges episodes deemed compatible with contemporary nationalist projects.[3] These revisionist strategies include glorifying selected periods, while relativising or omitting the violence of colonialism, dictatorship, and civil conflict.[4] The narratives often draw on long-standing imperial imaginaries, such as *Hispanidad* and *Quinto Império* [Fifth Empire], which are selectively reframed to legitimise contemporary nationalist projects and claims of cultural singularity. In a word, both parties, mirroring the somewhat parallel Iberian historical processes, and according to an essentialist approach, tend to stress: 1) the "beginnings" or the so-called *Reconquista*; 2) the apex of the "Age of Discoveries"; and 3) the more or less accomplished "redemptions" of the recent past embodied

2 Jörn Rüsen, *Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004).

3 Paula Giménez, "La historia como excusa," *Anfibia Podcast*, 19 September 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vperijlJyM.

4 Julián Casanova Ruiz, "Vox y la historia de la Guerra Civil y de la dictadura de Franco," in *Vox frente a la historia*, ed. Jesús María Casquete Badallo (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2023), 121-128.

in the 20th century dictatorships – all nostalgic of 1) and 2) against a backdrop of perceived national decline. According to the historian Roger Griffin, it was this "palingenetic myth" of rise, fall, and rebirth that nurtured both classic fascism and the new radical right.[5]

Furthermore, both parties accuse the education system of promoting "leftist" or "woke" interpretations that emphasise negative representations of their respective national pasts and erode positive forms of identification with the nation. Instead, they propose a somewhat more "positive" and "patriotic" reinterpretation rooted in nationalist and culturally conservative values. In this sense, they actively criticise analyses of the so-called "difficult pasts", such as slavery and colonial rule, to whitewash the imperial past. These attempts to reclaim control over historical narratives reflect not only political ambitions but also a broader epistemological crisis. The invocation of a supposed "freedom to reinterpret history", often grounded in subjective experience, affective identification, or family memory, directly challenges the epistemic authority of professional historiography.[6] In doing so, it undermines the foundations of historical knowledge as a critical and evidence-based field, posing a significant threat to democratic principles of pluralism and critical historical thinking.[7]

Methodologically, the analysis draws on a corpus consisting of party programmes (2019-2025), selected parliamentary debates in Spain and Portugal concerning education and historical memory, and digital materials disseminated through party websites and social media accounts. These sources were examined using discourse-oriented content analysis, which identified recurring narrative frames, symbolic repertoires, and temporal markers. The selection privileged documents and interventions explicitly referring to history, memory, national identity,

5 Roger Griffin, *Fascism. An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 40-43.

6 Samuel Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

7 Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Jörn Rüsen, *Evidence and Meaning: A Theory of Historical Studies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017).

or the school curriculum. Given the volatility and uneven preservation of online content, the analysis acknowledges the inherent limitations of capturing a dynamic, constantly shifting digital environment. Rather than aiming for exhaustive coverage, the approach seeks to identify dominant patterns that shape the radical right's mobilisation in the past in both countries.

The article is structured as follows. First, it situates the emergence of radical right discourses on history and education within broader historiographical and didactic debates. The analysis then shifts to the characterisation of the two political parties, Vox and Chega. Subsequently, the article discusses their visions of the national past and critiques of history and history education.

History education and the uses of the past (by the radical right)

The aims of history education and the definition of the past taught in classrooms have sparked intense debates in numerous countries, including Spain and Portugal. Underlying these controversies is the close relationship between history education and the construction of national identities: within the school context, young people often encounter, sometimes for the first time, structured narratives about their country's past, making educational legislation in this field a particularly contested terrain. Classical studies on nationalism have already explained the role of history as one of the foundations of national identity: the history of the nation and its mythical origins, its victories and defeats, constitute essential milestones in justifying the nationhood of a given territory and its inhabitants.[8]

8 The 1980s witnessed the publication of groundbreaking work on the emergence of nation-building processes and the development of nationalism in the 19th century that stressed the constructedness of national identities and underlined the fundamental role played by history in such processes. Examples of this concern the groundbreaking and influential concepts of "invented traditions" or "imagined communities". See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NI: Cornell University Press, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*

Since the 19th century, educational systems have played a central role in shaping national communities by socialising students into a shared language, culture, and historical narrative. School history, in particular, has functioned as a privileged space for the construction and consolidation of national self-images. As Marko Demantowsky argues, school history has been the arena in which a dominant national narrative has been established and legitimised, often at the expense of alternative or marginalised interpretations.[9] This interpretation is strongly supported by more recent research in the field of history didactics. Studies have consistently shown that history education plays a crucial role in processes of identity formation and collective memory construction.[10] In this light, "the study of history education in schools provides a great deal of information regarding identity formation in contemporary societies",[11] and, despite curricular reforms and historiographical updates, "the teaching of history is still intimately related to the construction of individual identity and the transmission of collective memory".[12] In this sense, debates over history education are never merely pedagogical but are deeply embedded in broader struggles over national identity, memory, and political legitimacy.

Past views about history teaching – reminiscent of dictatorial times – stressed the reception and memorisation of chronologically organised information about memorable events and protagonists often presented as heroes and models of values to follow. The identification of knowing history with memorising facts, concepts, and dates remains

(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

9 Marko Demantowsky, "What Is Public History," in *Public History and School: International Perspectives*, ed. Marko Demantowsky (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 3-38.

10 Sirkka Ahonen, "The Lure of Grand Narratives: A Dilemma for History Teachers," in *International Perspectives on Teaching Rival Histories: Pedagogical Responses to Contested Narratives and the History Wars*, ed. Henrik Åström Elmersjö, Anna Clark and Monika Vinterek (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 41-62, https://doi.org/ 10.1057/978-1-137-55432-1_3; Maria Grever and Tina Van der Vlies, "Why National Narratives Are Perpetuated: A Literature Review on New Insights from History Textbook Research," *London Review of Education* 15, n.º 2 (2017): 286-301, https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.15.2.11.

11 Mario Carretero, Mikel Asensio and María Rodríguez-Moneo (ed.), *History Education and the Construction of National Identities* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 3.

12 Ibid., 1

widespread in Spain. Such a view of history stems from the romantic history education predominant during the 19th century and a substantial part of the 20th, which was characterised by a politically biased and uncritical interpretation of the past, guided by linguistic and religious unity and a civilising and Christianising mission. Consequently, for a long time, history education has shown little concern for promoting a school history grounded in disciplinary knowledge.[13]

The Portuguese dictatorship of the *Estado Novo* [New State] (1933-1974) followed a similar pattern,[14] building on the nationalist approach developed during the later years of the Constitutional Monarchy and the First Republic (1911-1926). That is to say, a history of kings, heroes, and saints, emphasising women predominantly as symbols or as mothers. The model of rise (Middle Ages and "Age of Discoveries") and fall (17th and 18th centuries) was actively taught, with the *Estado Novo* adding a dimension of paroxysmal decline in relation to historical liberalism (19th and early 20th centuries).[15] Despite all the differences, the three Portuguese political regimes embraced the colonial "sacred inheritance myth", with the school promoting a sacrificial "white men's burden" and a "civilising mission". The intention was clear: to connect the early modern period of navigators with the so-called "pacification campaigns" in Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

However, this nationalist understanding of history education gradually gave way to a more disciplinary conception of history teaching, aimed at educating critical citizens.[16] History taught in the classroom today seeks to promote a deeper understanding of the past and the competencies needed to build students' own representations of it,

13 Cosme Jesús Gómez Carrasco and Raimundo A. Rodríguez Pérez, "La historia como materia formativa. Reflexiones epistemológicas e historiográficas," *Revista de Historiografía* 27 (2017): 265-286, https://doi.org/10.20318/revhisto.2017.3974.

14 Joaquim Pintassilgo, "O Estado Novo e a educação: entre a doutrinação e a escolarização dos portugueses," in *Políticas Educacionais e Regimes Autoritários: Intelectuais, Projetos e Instituições*, org. Leandro Pereira Gonçalves and Maurício Parada (Porto Alegre: Autografia, 2017), 116-144.

15 Sérgio Campos Matos, "Heróis e anti-heróis de uma memória histórica. Para a caracterização dos paradigmas de heroísmo nos manuais escolares (1895-1939)," *Clio. Revista do Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa* 6 (1987-1988): 39-77.

16 Carretero, Asensio and Rodríguez-Moneo, *History Education*.

always in accordance with the discipline's scientific criteria.[17] Critical thinking and multiperspectivity are central to these conceptions, as they help students confront univocal national narratives and patriotic histories and move toward more plural understandings of history.

Everyday uses – and abuses – of history, to quote Friedrich Nietzsche among others,[18] tend to forget that history as a science is characterised by regulated and institutionalised practices targeted to the production of declarative knowledge, expressed in standardised discursive forms and with procedures for its verification.[19] Thus, no account of the past has historiographical validity unless the minimum requirements of rigour are met. This is something that history education should convey to learners, together with basic knowledge of the procedures historians follow to construct their interpretations of the past, so that learners acquire the knowledge needed to counter historical manipulation and disinformation.

Nevertheless, after analysing history textbooks from the last year of compulsory secondary education in Spain, some authors argue that these educational media are gradually introducing activities to train learners in historical thinking skills and to promote historical consciousness through reflection on the past's influence on contemporary society. This knowledge should equip them with the tools to evaluate and counter disinformation about history critically.[20] Likewise, in Portugal, over the last 15 years, particular attention has been paid to the content of history textbooks, particularly their treatment of slavery, the Colonial War (1961-1974), and perceptions of the "other". These changes closely followed the public debate on colonial memories, the

17 Peter Lee, "Putting Principles into Practice: Understanding History," in *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom*, ed. M. Suzanne Donovan and John D. Bransford (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2005), 31-78.

18 See also Margaret Macmillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (Toronto: Penguin, 2008).

19 Alberto Rosa Rivero, "Memoria, historia e identidad: una reflexión sobre el papel de la enseñanza de la historia en el desarrollo de la ciudadanía," in *Aprender y pensar la historia*, coord. Mario Carretero and James F. Voss (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 2004), 51-52.

20 Amaia Lamikiz Jauregiondo and Ander Delgado Cendagortagalarza, "Memoria democrática y lugares de memoria en la enseñanza de la historia. Análisis de los libros de texto de 4.º de la ESO en la comunidad autónoma del País Vasco," *Clío* 50 (2024): 62-82, https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_clio/clio.20245010820.

fight against structural racism, EU recommendations, and several studies regarding textbooks.[21]

As we have seen, the views articulated by the radical right suggest that history is fundamental to promoting national identity and that school history constitutes a primary vehicle for transmitting historical knowledge oriented towards this purpose. From this perspective, a form of school history that does not serve such aims is frequently framed as anti-national indoctrination. From the standpoint of history education, however, these assumptions are approached quite differently.

First, it should be clarified that history education, as a scholarly and pedagogical field, is not itself a participant in the debate provoked by the radical right claims about school history. Moreover, radical right discourse is often perceived as undermining the aims of history as a curricular subject. The underlying question here seems to be: what is the purpose of the school history – is it to promote national identities, or to educate future citizens? History education specialists and proponents of radical right discourse approach this issue from markedly different positions. While the former are professionals specialised in history education, the latter speak from the perspective of non-specialists and resort to the long-standing strategy of mobilising history for ideological purposes. From the standpoint of specialists, this debate would lack substantive justification were it not for the tangible threat it poses to teachers' everyday classroom practices.[22]

It is within this context that the term "history wars" has been coined to describe disputes over who has the authority to define and control narratives of the past, highlighting the intensity and politicisation of these debates.[23] Disagreements over specific historical content

21 Marta Araújo and Silvia Maeso, "History Textbooks, Racism and the Critique of Eurocentrism: Beyond Rectification or Compensation," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35 (2012): 1266-1286, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.600767.

22 Diana E. Hess, *Controversy in the Classroom. The Democratic Power of Discussion* (London: Routledge, 2009).

23 Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004); Tony Taylor and Robert Guyver (eds.), *History Wars and the Classroom: Global Perspectives* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012).

have thus evolved into broader "culture wars" over the teaching of history in schools.[24] Tensions become particularly visible when specific socio-political actors perceive that their vision of the national past is not adequately represented in school curricula, or when certain groups promote a fixed and exclusive conception of what history education should be, rejecting alternative or plural approaches.[25]

At all the events, this trend is embedded in a broader transnational dynamic, drawing on discourses circulated by international radical right movements, such as "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) in the United States, and Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség [Hungarian Civic Alliance] in Hungary, that rely on emotionally charged simplifications of the past and on disinformation practices, amplified by algorithmic digital platforms.[26] While heterogeneous in their ideological profiles, all radical right parties share a strong emphasis on the nation as a central frame of reference and articulate their programmes around the perceived consequences of rapid social and economic transformations, including globalisation, migration, and the erosion of traditional values. As we will discuss in the subsequent sections, in both Spain and Portugal, education is becoming a privileged arena for the radical right's symbolic struggle, targeting not only historical narratives but also broader conceptions of citizenship, identity, and national belonging.

Vox and "historiographical populism"

Vox is the party representing the radical right wing in Spain. Since its creation in 2013, Vox has become the country's third political party. In the 2023 general election, it won 12.4% of the vote and secured 33

24 Carretero, Asensio, and Rodríguez-Moneo, *History Education*; Taylor and Guyver, *History Wars*; Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

25 Mateo Ballester Rodríguez, "Vox y el uso de la historia: el relato del pasado remoto de España como instrumento político," *Política y Sociedad* 58, n.º 2 (2021): 1-14, https://doi.org/10.5209/poso.69692. For a more general context, see Enzo Traverso, *El pasado, instrucciones de uso. Historia, memoria, política* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2007).

26 Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

of 350 seats in the Congress of Deputies. Recent polls indicate a rise in its voting intention, reaching the 18%.[27] This party managed to bring together people from different political backgrounds. There was a core group of activists from the conservative Partido Popular (PP) who were dissatisfied, among other issues, with the party's decisions regarding how to manage the end of ETA terrorism and, particularly relevant later, with its approach to addressing the demands of Catalan nationalism. From its foundation onwards, it succeeded in attracting individuals who had previously belonged to other extreme-right organisations, but above all, social sectors concerned about what they perceived as a crisis affecting Spain because of the Catalan independentist *procés*, which became especially evident in the events of 2017.[28] In December 2018, Vox achieved its first electoral success, securing representation in the Andalusian autonomous parliament. Since then, it has had representatives in city councils, autonomous community parliaments, and the Spanish parliament.

Since its emergence, Vox has focused attention on praising specific periods of Spanish history to demonstrate the country's "greatness" and foster Spanish national identity, as a means of countering the perceived threats to Spain's homogeneity posed by an increasingly multicultural and heterogeneous society. The emergence of Vox in Spanish politics has brought to light a traditional view of Spanish history, setting aside the reluctance other conservative groups may have felt to express their opinions on the past. This trend was accompanied by a national-Catholic revisionist historiography that insists on defending a traditional view of Spain: the struggle of Spaniards in defence of their nation and against their adversaries, both internal and external, by presenting the

27 Natalia Junquera, "Vox se dispara al 18% y eleva a 13 puntos la ventaja del bloque de la derecha sobre la izquierda," *El País*, 12 January 2026, https://elpais.com/espana/2026-01-12/vox-se-dispara-al-18-y-eleva-a-13-puntos-la-ventaja-del-bloque-de-la-derecha-sobre-la-izquierda.html.

28 Xabier Casals i Meseguer, "De Fuerza Nueva a Vox: de la vieja a la nueva ultraderecha española (1975-2019)," *Ayer. Revista de Historia Contemporánea* 118, n.º 2 (2020): 365-380, https://doi.org/10.55509/ayer/118-2020-14. Steven Forti, "De «PP auténtico» a extrema derecha *tout court*. Historia, ideología y organización de Vox," *Historia del Presente* 42 (2023): 9-28, https://doi.org/10.5944/hdp.42.2023.40268. Xabier Rius Sant, *Vox. El retorno de los ultras que nunca se fueron* (Madrid: Akal, 2023).

events that they consider foster the feeling of Spanish national identity, and the unity of the nation is emphasised.[29] The most relevant events supporting this view are the *Reconquista* and the struggle against Islam, the "discovery of America", the countering of the *Leyenda Negra* [Black Legend] regarding the Spanish colonial empire, and, finally, the Civil War (1936-1939) and Franco's regime. Examples include how to confront a progressive government labelled as "social-communist" or how to counter the rise of peripheral nationalisms. According to this perspective, it is also possible to draw lessons and valid insights from the past to help address the perceived crisis.[30]

This party's interest in a version of Spanish history that would reinforce identification with the Spanish nation can be traced back to its very beginnings, as evidenced by some of its political manifestos. The founding manifesto already emphasised the importance of Spanish unity and how history had demonstrated the country's tenacity in facing the difficult situations it had been forced to endure. In the current situation, which they viewed as a crisis, they intended to do the same. "Spain is a great nation that has always known how to overcome the difficult periods of its history thanks to the courage, determination, and sacrifice of its people. There must be no room for pessimism or discouragement during the difficult times we are facing."[31] In the party's 2018 policy document, titled "100 medidas para la España Viva [100 Measures for a Vibrant Spain"], the eighth point proposed the establishment of a "Comprehensive Plan for the understanding, dissemination, and protection of national identity and Spain's contribution to

29 Gilberto Aranda Bustamante and Rodrigo Escribano, "Las múltiples hibridaciones del posfranquismo populista de Vox," *Desafíos* 34, n.º 2 (2022): 1-36, https://doi.org/10.12804/revistas.urosario.edu.co/desafios/a.11063.

30 David Barreira, "Los 10 episodios favoritos de Vox en la Historia de España: así sucedieron de verdad," *El Español*, 23 January 2019, https://www.elespanol.com/cultura/historia/20190123/episodios-favoritos-vox-historia-espana-sucedieron-verdad/370464067_0.html and David Barreira, "Limpiar la Leyenda Negra y reescribir la Guerra Civil: otros cinco 'hits' históricos de Vox," *El Español*, 24 January 2019, https://www.elespanol.com/cultura/historia/20190123/episodios-favoritos-vox-historia-espana-sucedieron-verdad/370464067_0.html; Miguel Urban, *La emergencia de Vox. Apuntes para combatir a la extrema derecha española* (Barcelona: Crítica & Alternativa, 2019), 149-155.

31 Vox, *Manifiesto Fundacional*.

civilization and world history, with special attention to the deeds and exploits of our national heroes". To achieve this objective, the following point stated that "no parliament has the authority to define our past, much less to exclude Spaniards who differ from its definitions. The past cannot be used to divide us; on the contrary, we must jointly honour all those who, from different historical perspectives, fought for Spain."[32]

Over the years, Vox has organised a series of political events under the title "Viva", which have been attended by numerous international leaders from this political sphere. At the event held in October of 2022, the history of Spain played a central role in it. As noted on Vox's website, this political event and cultural festival was "dedicated to the history of Spain through 52 prominent figures who, through performances [...] trace[d] the different historical periods". Furthermore, during the event, attendees had "the opportunity to learn about the writers, scientists, warriors, kings... who shaped Spain, under the slogan «The History We Made Together» [La Historia que hicimos juntos]."[33] As the leader of this party noted in a post on the social media platform X announcing this event, "We will never allow anyone to manipulate, fabricate, or erase the HISTORY of Spain. At #VIVA22, we will keep in mind the Spaniards who forged our nation."[34] In 2021, as part of the Viva 21 events, they released their manifesto titled "Agenda España", which once again highlighted the role of Spanish history in fostering national unity. Therefore, among its numerous measures, it proposed "promoting and protecting national identity and Spain's contribution to civilisation and universal history, with special attention to the deeds and feats of our national heroes both within and beyond our borders."[35]

32 Vox, *100 medidas para la España Viva.* https://www.voxespana.es/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/100medidasngal_101319181010040327.pdf.

33 https://www.voxespana.es/actualidad/vox-prepara-viva-22-historia-espana-como-protagonista-20220803. A critical view of this event in Ana Isabel Carrasco, "Los Reyes Católicos en la propaganda de Vox: entre neofalangismo y glorias de cartón piedra," in *Vox frente a la historia*, ed. Jesús Casquete (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2023), 35-43.

34 Message reproduced in Natalia Cristobal, "«La historia que hicimos juntos»: las claves de VIVA 22 el acto que Vox celebrará este octubre", *El Debate*, 11 September 2022 [Consulted the 20.04.2026 in https://www.eldebate.com/espana/20220911/historia-hicimos-juntos-claves-viva-22-acto-vox-prepara-este-octubre_57960.html].

35 Consulted the 20.04.2026 in https://www.voxespana.es/agenda-espana.

The term "historiographical populism" was coined to define this approach to History, characterised by the propagation of biased explanations of the past based on populist resources that clash with academic research, which they tend to despise and even discredit in public.[36] According to this approach, educational research is accused of manipulation and treason against the nation, and it has become common to question historians' work or even to disqualify them personally.[37] In contrast to previous periods, these views have had a broader social and political impact in recent years. In fact, such patriotic discourse among conservative sectors has demonstrated considerable adaptability to the new political context that began with the *Transición* [transition]. This "historiographical populism", however, has been widely criticised by academic historians.[38]

Chega as radical right: identity, nostalgia, and populist moralism

In Portugal, the party Chega became the second-largest parliamentary force after the 2025 legislative elections (it won 22,76% of the vote and 60 seats out of a total of 230).[39] The rise of the radical right has unfolded within a distinctive historical and mnemonic framework marked by two intertwined legacies: the *Estado Novo* regime and the colonial empire, whose demise coincided with the Carnation Revolution of

36 Edgar Straehle-Porras, "El populismo historiográfico como problema y síntoma del presente," *CTXT. Contexto y Acción*, 6 October 2021, https://ctxt.es/es/20211001/Firmas/37438/populismo-histo-riografico-; Edgar Straehle-Porras, "Reflexiones sobre el populismo historiográfico en España. Un ejercicio de historiografía del presente," *Revista Stultifera de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales* 8, n.º 1 (2025): 29-58.

37 Javier Tebar, "Los populismos historiográficos en el nacionalismo español: usos del pasado y problemas de la historia en el siglo xxi," *Revista de Historiografía* 39 (2024): 425, https://doi.org/10.20318/revhisto.2024.7977.

38 See the works of Jesús Casquete (ed.), *Vox frente a la historia* (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2023) and Steven Forti (ed.), *Mitos y cuentos de la extrema derecha* (Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2023). Or the already mentioned articles by Mateo Ballester Rodríguez, "Vox y el uso de la historia."

39 For recent synthesis, see: *Chega. The New Portuguese Far Right*, ed. João Carvalho (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2026). Although the different chapters do not directly address the issue of (political) education, it is worth examining the party's presence in traditional and digital media, as well as its electoral geography and electoral growth.

1974-1975.[40] Chega, founded in 2019, has made both legacies central to its political identity and to its ongoing attempt to rewrite the national past. As the journalist Miguel Carvalho notes in his recently published book, the party emerged as a movement that "feeds on democratic degradation and the discredit of politics,"[41] presenting itself as a patriotic force of redemption against the alleged leftist corruption of the system (and the elites) born from the Carnation Revolution.

Nevertheless, while Salazar's *Estado Novo* exalted Portugal's civilising mission and its so-called lusotropicalist exceptionality in dealing with the "other"[42] – even if only rhetorically –, Chega, most of the time, re-signifies this imperial mythology within an openly nativist and exclusionary discourse grounded in a Christian-Western identity framework. The slogan "Portugal for the Portuguese", recurrent in the party rallies and online performances, echoes the ethnocultural logic of European and American radical right movements, where the nation is portrayed as besieged by immigrants, "welfare parasites", and cosmopolitan elites. As was demonstrated, the anti-immigration rhetoric has become the cornerstone of Chega's ideological construction, blending cultural racism with the defence of an imagined "moral majority."[43] This classification is underscored by a report from the Global Project against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE), which explicitly profiles Chega among Portugal's radical right and hate-oriented organisations.[44] In the same way, political scientist Vicente Valentim placed the party on the radical right, arguing

40 Riccardo Marchi, *A Nova Direita Anti-Sistema. O caso do Chega* (Lisboa: Edições 70, 2020); Diogo Noivo, "Chega y el fin de la inmunidad lusa," *Historia del Tempo Presente* 42 (2023): 29-42.

41 Miguel Carvalho, *Por Dentro do Chega: A Face Oculta da Extrema-Direita em Portugal* (Lisbon: Contraponto, 2025), 14.

42 Cláudia Castelo, *O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo. O Luso-Tropicalismo e a Ideologia Colonial Portuguesa (1933-1961)* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1999), 14-15.

43 Rafael Calado Saturnini, "A Extrema-Direita e a Imigração em Portugal: Discursos e Representações no Contexto Pós-Crise" (master's diss., Instituto Universitário de Lisboa [ISCTE-IUL], 2022), 8, https://repositorio.iscte-iul.pt/handle/10071/27042.

44 Global Project against Hate and Extremism, "Novo relatório do GPAHE identifica grupos de ódio e de extrema-direita radicais em Portugal; inclui o Chega!", *Global Extremism Database*, 26 June 2023, https://globalextremism.org/post/novo-relatorio-do-projeto-global-contra-o-odio-e-o-extremismo-identifica-grupos-de-odio-e-de-extrema-direita-radicais-em-portugal-inclui-o-chega/.

that the relationship between its rhetoric and its voter base has followed the same pattern of normalisation through three stages observed in other countries: latency, activation and revelation.[45]

Electoral campaigns, especially since 2023, have made this discourse visible in public space, through posters and social media advertisements targeting Roma communities and immigrants from Bangladesh, transforming prejudice into spectacle. These visual devices, often framed as "defence of national identity", translate nativist ideology into a pedagogy of fear, producing what Miguel Carvalho calls "a moral panic aesthetic"[46] that blurs the line between civic debate and hate speech. The narrative of a lost greatness, rooted in the "Age of Discoveries" and the colonial empire, is mobilised to counter the perceived humiliation of decolonisation. Chega's speeches contrast "the heroic empire" with the "chaos" of democracy, systematically downplaying the violence of the colonial wars and reframing the process of independence as a betrayal of the so-called *retornados* [returnees and former colonists who left the empire in the wake of African independence].[47] This *saudade* [longing] operates as what Svetlana Boym terms "restorative nostalgia": a longing not for the past itself but for the hierarchies that sustained it.[48]

Nevertheless, it is not only the radical right that expresses *saudade* for the colonial empire. Portuguese society as a whole continues to show signs of imperial nostalgia. As demonstrated by a recent study scientifically coordinated by António Costa Pinto, one in three Portuguese respondents stated that they would prefer Portugal to remain a colonial empire. However, the study also reveals a more critical dimension: more than 40% of those surveyed recognise that the Portuguese empire was racist.[49]

45 Vicente Valentim, *O Fim da Vergonha. Como a Direita Radical se Normalizou* (Lisbon: Gradiva, 2024).

46 Miguel Carvalho, *Por Dentro do Chega*, 60.

47 On this conceptualisation and historical process, see: Elsa Peralta, ed., *The Retornados from the Portuguese Colonies in Africa. Memory, Narrative, and History* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2021).

48 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

49 André Rodrigues, "Um terço dos portugueses sente nostalgia colonial. Os impérios deixam uma grande marca," *Renascença*, 19 December 2025, https://rr.pt/noticia/pais/2025/12/19/

Building on the long-term evolution of the Portuguese radical right, Chega appears less a rupture than the latest expression of a continuum connecting authoritarian nationalism, colonial nostalgia, and post-1974 populism.[50] More recent analyses underline how the party capitalises on the exhaustion of representative politics to re-legitimise narratives of order, obedience, and providential leadership.[51] In this light, the leader's charisma is interpreted as a form of political messianism embedded in a long Portuguese tradition of Sebastianism [the lost king], in which salvation is projected onto a single leader who promises to restore the nation's moral unity. This self-styled providential leadership with historical content was particularly evident in André Ventura's 2025 presidential campaign, when, in a televised interview with SIC, he declared that "the country is so rotten with corruption, impunity and banditry that we would need three Salazars to set it straight."[52] While insisting that he is "a democrat by nature", the invocation of Salazar as a moral solution to the regime's alleged decay illustrates the normalisation of authoritarian memory through the language of moral regeneration. By intertwining the promise of a "Fourth Republic" with the figure of the dictator who inherited the ashes of the First, Chega seems to reframe authoritarian nostalgia as patriotic common sense, sometimes even using the Salazarist motto of "Deus, Pátria, Família" [God, Fatherland, and Family] for propaganda purposes.

Vox's vision of history: turning the negative into positive

The last education law approved in Spain in 2020 and the Law of Democratic Memory of 2022 have sparked controversy, affecting education

um-terco-dos-portugueses-sente-nostalgia-colonial-os-imperios-deixam-uma-grande-marca/452322/.

50 Bruno Madeira, "A intervenção cultural como estratégia de assalto ao poder das direitas radicais portuguesas (1976-2019)," in *Novas e Velhas Extrema-Direitas*, coord. Cecília Honório and João Mineiro (Lisbon: Edições Parsifal, 2021), 153-156.

51 Alexandre R. Malhado, *Dias de Raiva. Os Segredos da Ascensão de André Ventura* (Lisbon: Objectiva, 2023).

52 Miguel Pereira Santos, "Ventura diz que 'eram precisos três Salazares para pôr Portugal na ordem'," *Observador*, 24 October 2025, https://observador.pt/2025/10/24/ventura-diz-que-eram-precisos-tres-salazares-para-por-portugal-na-ordem/.

and provoking accusations that they indoctrinate Spanish students by promoting a negative view of Spanish history, undermining their national pride.[53] To counter this, some sectors of Spanish society propose reframing the negative and promoting an interpretation of Spanish national history that enables Spaniards to be "proud" of their past. For this purpose, history education should emphasise the lives and deeds of the significant figures who defended Spain.[54] As stated in their 2018 programme, Vox proposed an integral plan to protect national identity and to promote and disseminate knowledge of Spain's contributions to civilisation and universal history, with particular attention to the deeds of national heroes.

Turning the negative into positive means promoting national identity by defending national history. One of the fundamental milestones in this positive national history is the *Reconquista* and the fight against Islam, which are often connected to anti-immigration discourses. The *Reconquista* is widely regarded as both the expulsion of Muslim invaders from Spain and the subsequent unification of the nation, linking it to national, traditional, and Catholic values.[55] This discourse has also been present in other conservative spheres,[56] but Vox has stood out

53 A key feature of the Spanish government is its decentralisation and the division of powers between the central government and the various autonomous communities, which have the authority to enact regulations regarding certain general laws of the central government within their geographical jurisdiction. This is the education case, in which some autonomous communities, governed by the PP with support from Vox, have sought to limit the impact – considered negative – of central government legislation. Something similar has also occurred in the realm of historical memory: in some autonomous communities governed by the aforementioned parties, corresponding legislation –known as "Laws of Concord" – has been passed, seeking to limit the effects of the Law on Democratic Memory approved by the Spanish government. This was the case, for example, in the autonomous communities of Castile-León, Aragon, Cantabria, Extremadura, Murcia, and Valencia. Due to space constraints, only state-level legislation is analysed here, although it is necessary to note this limitation to illustrate the complexity and heterogeneity of the subject under study.

54 A broader account of the historical events highlighted by the positive meant promoting national identity through this party can be found in David Barreira, "Los 10 episodios favoritos de Vox" and "Limpiar la Leyenda Negra".

55 Marcos García Rey, "Vox y la Reconquista en las elecciones: «Don Pelayo era un tío con dos huevos»," *El Confidencial*, 12 April 2019, https://www.elconfidencial.com/cultura/2019-04-12/vox-reconquista-andalus-historia-desproposito_1938810/.

56 Alejandro García-Sanjuan, "Rejecting al-Andalus, exalting the Reconquista: historical memory in contemporary Spain," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 10, n.º 1 (2018): 127-145; and Alejandro García-Sanjuan, "Weaponising historical knowledge. The notion of Reconquista in Spanish nationalism," *Imago Temporis: Medium Aevum*, XIV (2020): 133-162.

most in its use to justify the defence of Spanish unity and its rejection of Islam. Some of the historical events that this party has chosen to defend its patriotic historical discourse are the Battle of Covadonga (722), the Battle of Navas de Tolosa (1212), and the surrender of Granada (1492).[57]

This "narrative of greatness" continued with the promotion of an imperial mythology based on the civilising and Christianising mission of the Spanish empire, and with the emergence of the idea of *Hispanidad*, created to counter the humiliation of colonial loss and to unite the people of Spain and Spanish-speaking Latin American countries. It is also an attempt to counter the "Black Legend" regarding the Spanish colonial empire. In this context, the historical figure of the Basque military Blas de Lezo has acquired a special relevance for Vox, for whom this figure represents all the values of *Hispanidad*; Blas de Lezo's personal sacrifice for the defence of the Spanish empire and against the Catalans in the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) were seen as specially relevant in 2017, when Catalonia seemed to situate itself against Spain.[58] In a symbolic gesture, Vox launched its 2019 general election campaign precisely at the statue dedicated to Blas de Lezo in Madrid. Again, a journalistic chronicle of this event noted that every detail that serves to valorise Spain's history is being overseen to "rethink the history of Spain and turn into positive what for centuries has been presented as negative".[59]

Finally, the War of Independence against France, fought between 1808 and 1814, constitutes another milestone in Spanish history, particularly for its emphasis on the Spanish people's participation. This

57 David Barreira, "Los 10 episodios favoritos de Vox" and "Limpiar la Leyenda Negra."

58 Gonzalo Ugidos, "Blas de Lezo: el héroe español del que Vox quiere hacer una película," *El Mundo*, 3 February 2019, https://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2019/02/03/5c56cf9821efa0370b8b4622.html.

59 Gregoria Caro, "De Lezo a Covadonga: las gestas heroicas que marcan la campaña de Vox," *ABC*, 13 April 2019, https://www.abc.es/elecciones/elecciones-generales/abci-elecciones-generales-2019-lezo-covadonga-gestas-heroicas-marcan-campana-201904130224_noticia.html?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.abc.es%2Felecciones%2Felecciones-generales%2Fabci-elecciones-generales-2019-lezo-covadonga-gestas-heroicas-marcan-campana-201904130224_noticia.html.

war is seen as an occasion to unite Spaniards against the foreign enemy, and the role of the Spanish people and their demands is admired in contrast to the attitudes of Spanish rulers, military commanders, or even the Crown, which, in many cases, was perceived as shameful. This interpretation of events promotes a populist message that Vox extends to the current Spanish political situation.

Another example of this trend, aimed at restoring a more positive view of the Spanish past, is the tendency to whitewash the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) by offering a more favourable interpretation. According to this view, people did not live as badly under the dictatorship, and not everything was so negative. The often-repeated slogan "people lived better under Franco" exemplifies this reinterpretation of the recent Spanish past. Moreover, the outbreak of the Civil War is presented as a consequence of the radicalisation of the republican government, which compelled specific political sectors to adopt measures to prevent Spain's revolutionary drift. According to this view, the massacres committed by republican forces in different parts of Spain, as in Madrid in 1936, constituted the clearest example of the radicalisation of the republicans.[60]

The above-mentioned view of Spanish history is reminiscent of that promoted by the Franco regime during the dictatorship. It suggests that the stigma that has characterised Francoist interpretations of history since the Transition to democracy is disappearing.[61] There is now less hesitation about recovering the view of Spanish history that connects with *nacionalcatolicismo* [national Catholicism]. An analysis of parliamentary debates since 2020 clearly reveals Vox's views on Spanish history: the Spanish nation and its history are placed at the forefront of current political debates, where a critical view of contem-

60 Ander Delgado, "Sobre la enseñanza del pasado democrático en España. Alumnado, polarización y redes sociales," *REIDICS. Revista de Investigación en Didáctica de las Ciencias Sociales* 14, n.º 1 (2024): 102-118, https://doi.org/10.17398/2531-0968.14.06.

61 Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas, S*uspiros de España. El nacionalismo español, 1808-2018* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2018), 91.

porary history education, perceived as opposed to the interests of the Spanish nation, prevails.

First, they argue that, in some autonomous communities, history is manipulated to undermine Spanish identity among youth. Conservative thinking regards the lack of a common history education for all Spanish students as a serious threat to Spanish unity, and, in regions of Spain with alternative national identities, the history taught in classrooms, according to this view, is falsified and constitutes a menace to the development of a common identity. For them, specific autonomous communities "indoctrinate students with separatist aims, offering a biased and incomplete view of history, which implies an unacceptable lack of rigour"; moreover, history teaching in those communities would be using education as a weapon for secession and to break Spain, they allege.[62]

Secondly, even if this accusation of indoctrination was initially directed at autonomous communities where alternative national identities existed, both Vox and PP extended it to the entire Spanish educational system after the 2022 Law of Democratic Memory was approved by the PSOE-led government. They denounced that this legislation served the indoctrination of Spaniards, to manipulate their opinions about the democratic past of the country and to defend the political interests of the government, which was accused of using and manipulating history to protect their own leftist ideology against right-wing political forces. The government was accused of imposing a manipulated "official" interpretation of history on all Spanish citizens, selecting those parts of history that best served its aims and concealing those that did not. Furthermore, they accused the government of manipulating school history, promoting a manichean and sectarian view of the past to indoctrinate youth through public education ideologically.

Members of Vox affirmed that "the purpose of this propaganda is to inculcate in the minds of the Spanish people the equation according

62 Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Pleno y Diputación Permanente*, 17 June 2020, 49; and Congreso de los Diputados, *Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales. Congreso de los Diputados*, 20 October 2020, 8.

to which «left» equals and will always equate to democracy and freedom, and «right» to fascism and repression".[63] For them, this implied that Spanish fundamental liberties were endangered by the imposition of an official history described as totalitarian, intended to attack the freedom of thought of the Spanish people.

Along these lines, Vox's discourse argued one last point: against this manipulated historical narrative that did not present all the truth about the different periods of the Spanish past, they defended the freedom of citizens to establish their own view of the past, hence bringing up the "truth" against a partial and manipulated "official history". One of the freedoms that was being limited with these educational and legislative decisions was the freedom of expression and thought, the freedom to have their own view about history, different from the "official" narrative imposed by the government.

In the case of the Law of Democratic Memory, Vox members denounced the legislation for limiting freedom of thought that allows citizens to "come to their own conclusions about history, based on their own research and their own readings".[64] This idea of the freedom to establish one's own version of history is repeated in several of Vox's speeches, suggesting that it is part of the political arguments used by the party's parliamentary representatives. As a representative of this party pointed out in the amendments to the Law of Democratic Memory, "this law is totalitarian because it imposes an official view of history, an extraordinarily sectarian view. This is typical of totalitarian regimes. In free countries, the government allows citizens to reach their own conclusions about history, based on their own research and

63 Congreso de los Diputados, *Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales. Congreso de los Diputados*, 14 December 2021, 15. See also Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Comisiones*, 4 July 2022, 13.

64 Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Comisiones*, 4 July 2022, 13. The leader of Vox, Santiago Abascal, already mentioned this idea in a book of interviews with party leaders published in 2019. There, he pointed out that "Vox does not have a position on the Civil War and Franco's regime, but it does have a position on freedom: we Spaniards have the right to interpret our past as we please, without the Left having to come and tell us all how to interpret it." See Mateo Ballester Rodríguez, "Vox y el uso de la historia," 7.

readings. Therefore, the very concept of democratic memory is an oxymoron; it is contradictory". An idea that is defined more clearly later on: "To establish, by decree, a partisan interpretation of history and to impose it on society using the state's coercive instruments is typical of despots. In free countries, political power does not arrogate to itself historical omniscience but allows citizens to reach their own conclusions about historical issues through their own readings, experiences, and conversations."[65] To sum up, this last argument reveals a misconception of freedom and a complete ignorance of historical discipline. Moreover, it implies a challenge to the epistemic authority of professional historiography.

A fatherland of heroes and a land of saints?

Public debates surrounding education, historical memory, and national identity have become a recurring feature of Chega's political discourse. In the absence of major legislative reforms comparable to those adopted in Spain, Chega has nevertheless consistently framed the Portuguese educational system as a central site of ideological imposition. As stated in the programme presented for the legislative elections of 18 May 2025, *Saving Portugal* argues that "schools and universities should become genuine spaces of freedom and learning, rather than factories of indoctrination." Furthermore, "it is imperative that education be freed from any ideological burden, and that both school and academic environments cease to function as strongholds of «woke» excesses and left-wing agendas."[66]

Through parliamentary interventions, media appearances, and digital communication, the party portrays schools and teachers as decisive agents. In 2019, the political programme advocated the "aboli-

65 Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Comisiones*, 4 July 2022, 13. See also Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Pleno y Diputación Permanente*, 14 October 2021, 62.

66 Chega, *Programa Eleitoral 2025: Salvar Portugal* (Lisbon: Chega, 2025), 20, https://pub-acfa34005415427bb560174ca37a9c6f.r2.dev/Programa%20Eleitoral%20CHEGA%20-%202025.pdf.

tion of the Ministry of Education", and that the "state would retain an arbitral, regulatory, and inspection function, exercised by a body under the authority of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers" in a system of school vouchers under municipal supervision.[67] In this sense, according to identical radical right views from other foreign parties, it also proposed "an educational system accessible to all, oriented toward the consolidation of Judeo-Christian cultural and civilizational values, without interference from currents aligned with so-called «gender ideology» or the so-called «cultural Marxism»."[68]

In later documents from 2021 and 2024, the "gender ideology" and "woke" mantras were intertwined with literary and historical assumptions: "With rare exceptions, nothing is being taught, since a culture of easygoingness prevails. There is no desire to traumatise children with the *Iliad* or with the history of Europe and the European nations to which we belong."[69] Furthermore, to capitalise on long-standing professional discontent within the teaching profession, inherited from trade union struggles of the last decades (including the years of Troika Intervention of 2011 to 2015 in the wake of the sovereign debt crisis), Chega denounces the "facilitism in public schools" of "unruly and parasitic students"[70] and extols the ideas of "respect and hierarchy" clearly echoing the (dictatorship) past.

At all the events, the previously mentioned document, *Saving Portugal*, is more explicit, with no fewer than 107 occurrences of the word "teaching" and 29 of the word "history". Thus, targeting immigration, this official document advocates amending the nationality law, emphasising that applicants should "know the history of our country

67 Chega, *Programa Político 2019: Legislativas de 2019* (Lisbon: Chega, 2019), 30, https://raquelcardeiravarela.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/programa_polc38dtico_2019_chega-2.pdf.

68 Chega, *Programa Político 2019*, 43.

69 José António Ribeiro de Carvalho, "Moção temática: pela meritocracia e pelo fim da ideologia no ensino: construir uma escola de qualidade", VI Convenção Nacional do Partido Chega, Viana do Castelo, 12-14 January 2024, 4, https://partidochega.pt/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Partido-Chega_20240110_172341_m10.pdf.

70 Chega, *Reforma do Ensino Básico e Secundário. Seis Princípios Fundamentais 2021 (approved at the VII National Council)*. Sagres, 2021.

and identify themselves with Portuguese culture and traditions." That is to say, the knowledge of "a nation nearly 900 years old, [that] has a history written with honour, loyalty and sacrifice by its military personnel."[71] The document also emphasises the current and growing dispute over memory[72] when it states the need for "develop national programmes to celebrate the founding dates of the nation and other important events and figures, always with the involvement of historians who will participate in defining cultural events." A second idea comes from the suggestion of promoting "travelling exhibitions and educational materials for schools" could "reinforce knowledge of Portuguese history among new generations."[73]

These trends are crucial in the party's *Weltanschauung*. It is well known that, from time to time, specific right-wing sectors attempt to re-signify the 5 October (1910) national holiday of the "Implantation of the Republic" as 5 October (1143), the day of the Treaty of Zamora, one of the key moments in the process toward Portuguese Independence.[74]

Other feuds centred on 10 June, "Portugal, Camões, and Portuguese Communities Day", which, during the *Estado Novo*, was symbolically celebrated as the "Day of the Race". For instance, in 2025 in Lagos, during an official speech, the writer Lídia Jorge sought to balance imperial nostalgia with a renewed awareness of Portuguese involvement in the slave trade. In her words: "Lagos exposes the memory of this remorse. It shows how, on a scorching hot day in August 1444, 235 individuals captured off the coast of Mauritania landed here

71 Chega, *Programa Eleitoral 2025: Salvar Portugal*, 20, 109.

72 Miguel Cardina, *O Atrito da Memória. Colonialismo, Guerra e Descolonização no Portugal Contemporâneo* (Lisbon: Tinta-da-china, 2023).

73 Chega, *Programa Eleitoral 2025: Salvar Portugal*, 256. It also stressed the need to "strengthen public funding for national cinema, directing resources towards national film productions that value Portuguese identity and history, encouraging the development of national cinema and ensuring thematic pluralism."

74 "1143" is also the name of a Portuguese ultranationalist and neo-Nazi organisation associated with hate speech, xenophobic activism, and extremist violence. See Global Project against Hate and Extremism, "Grupo 1143: A Far Right Football Club Revived as Anti-Muslim Activists," *Global Extremism*, 30 January 2024, https://globalextremism.org/post/grupo-1143-far-right-football-club-revived-as-anti-muslim-activists/.

and how they were divided up and by whom."[75] This speech sparked a strong reaction by the leader of Chega, who retorted that "we [the Portuguese] cannot go down the dangerous path of saying that we are to blame for the slavery that existed in the world."[76] He extended this criticism to contemporary debates on reparations: "Any government that tries to make Portugal revise its history, blaming itself or seeking to return anything to the former colonies, whatever it may be, will fall in Parliament the very next day."[77]

This public confrontation over the memory of slavery is directly connected to current debates about how slavery and the Atlantic slave trade are addressed in schools and textbooks. In the last 15 years, research by scholars and analyses in the press underline that Portuguese curricula still tend to present slavery in fragmented or euphemistic ways, emphasising maritime expansion or commercial networks while minimising racialised violence and the systemic nature of enslavement.[78] The Lagos episode thus exposes the political dimensions of history and the expanding space for ideological and educational debates, showing how disputes over national identity and responsibility shape what is taught, or omitted, in classrooms. Note that in a parliamentary intervention in 2023, the then MP from Chega and history teacher Gabriel Mithá Ribeiro stated that "social thinking is poisoned by prejudices and falsehoods about slavery, racism, or «colonialism»".[79] Almost the same could be deduced from an article published in the party's official

75 Lídia Jorge, *Discurso de Lídia Jorge nas Comemorações de 10 de Junho em 2025 em Lagos*. Cátedra Lídia Jorge, https://www.unige.ch/catedra-lidia-jorge/index.php/eventos/passados/discurso-de-lidia-jorge-nas-comemoracoes-do-10-de-junho-de-2025-em-lagos.

76 "André Ventura critica discurso de Lídia Jorge no 10 de Junho," *SIC Notícias*, 10 June 2025, https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2025-06-10-video-andre-ventura-critica-discurso-de-lidia-jorge-no-10-de-junho-55fc8a0b.

77 "André Ventura critica discurso de Lídia Jorge no 10 de Junho", *SIC Notícias*.

78 Rosa Cabecinhas, "A memória da nação na era planetária: passados e futuros em debate," *Análise Social* 58, n.º 4 (2023): 766-788, https://doi.org/10.31447/as00032573.2023249.07. The Ministry of Education centrally defines the Portuguese national curriculum and is guided by the *Aprendizagens Essenciais* [Essential Learnings], homologated in 2018. This document did not introduce a radical revision of historical content.

79 Gabriel Mithá Ribeiro, "Intervention in Plenary Session of the Assembly of the Republic (Portugal) – 13 January 2023," *Diário da Assembleia da República*, XV Legislature, 1st Legislative Session, 14 January 2023, 8.

newspaper, which used a "whataboutism" argument about other enslavers around the world across different historical eras.[80]

In any case, the most significant disputes regarding national holidays occurred during the 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution. Whether emulating or opposing, the truth is that the right-wing sectors presented another 25th (November 1975) as a return to the "purity" of 25 April 1974, celebrating a military uprising that is still the subject of intense debate among historians.[81] In fact, 25 November 1975 remains clouded by notorious ambiguities, largely due to divergent military testimony. The conflict did not pit civilians against soldiers, but rather rival factions within the Armed Forces. In this sense, historian Irene Pimentel rejects the political attempt, especially on the right, to equate 25 November with 25 April, viewing this as a strategy to relativise the Revolution's foundational meaning, namely, the overthrow of a right-wing dictatorship. Textbooks have increasingly highlighted this issue.[82] In recent editions, they even introduced the final phase of the revolution by asking (the students), "why was 25 November 1975 important?[83]"

Chega also (re)evaluated other aspects of late colonialism. For instance, "school textbooks encourage children to discuss racism while omitting that white people were expelled from Africa and killed for being white."[84] These views, as might be expected, are echoed in both the official newspaper and in the parliamentary debates. In this way, a 2023 debate revolved around the Wiriyamu Massacre committed by the colonial army in Mozambique in 1972, with a Chega MP remembering other massacres committed by African liberation movements that "far

80 Rudolfo Ventura, "Portugal e a escravatura. Parte I," *Folha Nacional*, 18 May 2024, https://folhanacional.pt/2024/05/18/portugal-e-a-escravatura-parte-1/.

81 Maria Inácia Rezola, *Revolução. A Construção da Democracia Portuguesa* (Alfragide: D. Quixote, 2025), 13-18.

82 Sérgio Neto and Clara Isabel Serrano, "Reconstruir-se dos escombros do fascismo. A Revolução dos Cravos nos manuais portugueses de história do 9.º ano (1975-2023)", *European Public & Social Innovation Review* 10 (2025):1-21, https://doi.org/10.31637/epsir-2025-1181.

83 Cláudia Amaral, Bárbara Alves, Tiago Tadeu and Olanda Vilaça, *História sob Investigação – 9.º Ano* (Porto: Porto Editora, 2023), 177.

84 Miguel Carvalho, *Por Dentro do Chega*, 493.

exceed, in number and brutality, that of Wiriyamu".[85] Or, based on the claim that the Minister of Culture "will return heritage to the former Portuguese colonies", a dramatic and all-catch argument by the party leader followed: "I would like to express here, sincerely and from the bottom of my heart, this appeal to the millions of *retornados*, to the ex-combatants and to those who today, reading this news, thought «how betrayed my family and I have been»: we are still here and we will be your voice".[86]

Regarding other "crucial" historical periods, such as the Middle Ages, the party has cultivated a mythographic repertoire in which religious, monarchical, and imperial symbols are merged through deliberate anachronisms and hybrid visual codes.[87] These gestures have been theatrically staged, most visibly during the 2021 and 2024 political campaigns, when the leader André Ventura knelt in prayer before the tomb of the first Portuguese king, Afonso Henriques, in Coimbra's Santa Cruz monastery, a ritual of political sacralisation broadcast by national media.

Several cartoons were widely circulated on social media. For instance, one compares the two leaders with a map of Portugal superimposing the *Reconquista* and recent Chega electoral results, with the following caption: "What sets these men apart? Afonso conquered the country from north to south; André is conquering the country from south to north." The other cartoon shows King Afonso Henriques rising from his tomb in shock upon seeing contemporary multicultural Portugal, and thereby invoking a mythologised, ethnically homogeneous Middle Ages to frame diversity as a threat to national identity, a strate-

85 Pedro Pessanha, "Intervention in Plenary Session of the Assembly of the Republic (Portugal) – 13 January 2023," *Diário da Assembleia da República*, XV Legislature, 1st Legislative Session, 27 January 2023, 19-20.

86 André Ventura "Intervention in Plenary Session of the Assembly of the Republic (Portugal) – 13 January 2023," *Diário da Assembleia da República*, XV Legislature, 1st Legislative Session, 26 November 2022, 136.

87 Afonso Silva, "El legado revolucionario y su reinterpretación por la nueva extrema derecha nacionalista en Portugal," *Millars Espai i Història* 59 (2025): 107-135, https://doi.org/10.6035/Millars.2025.59.5.

gy widely documented in studies of medievalism and the radical right.[88] Against the backdrop of a stylised church topped by the (republican) national flag, the king, known as "the conqueror", regrets: "This can't be happening." Essentially, this design mirrored the process already carried out in France by the radical right, which, departing from the Battle of Tours (732), tried to associate the past and the present to attack immigration.

In light of these accounts and elements, it is possible to conclude that Portuguese history is subject to a clear revisionist approach, even when official educational documents or textbooks remain somewhat immune to such overt radicalism. On the one hand, the party did not come to power, despite its growing parliamentary representation. As stated by the above-quoted Mithá Ribeiro: "Programs cannot be changed overnight, but there is a lack of open academic debate, even about the very idea of the *Estado Novo*. There is a tendency to erase the positive and overemphasise the negative."[89] On the other hand, as we have seen, many Portuguese people still look back on the imperial past with pride, which means that the radical right can easily engage with them in a non-formal "educational" approach, so to speak. Directing its arguments towards the "shadows" that might obscure or challenge the "good" memory, Chega is following the trend of *Estado Novo* regime when recounting a "story" of a "fatherland of heroes and a land of saints".[90]

Moreover, when the mentioned journalist Miguel Carvalho referred in an interview that "I am concerned about the resolve with which Chega's narrative is already entering schools,"[91] dedicating the

88 Daniel Wollenberg, *Medieval Imagery in Today's Politics*, Past Imperfect series (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvg251d4; Pedro Martins and Alicia Miguelez Cavero, "Os usos da Idade Média no discurso político atual," *Público*, 4 February 2021, https://www.publico.pt/2021/02/04/opiniao/noticia/usos-idade-media-discurso-politico-atual-1948960.

89 Miguel Carvalho, *Por Dentro do Chega*, 493.

90 António Severo and Francisco Marinho, *Heróis de Portugal. 3.ª Classe* (Porto: Livraria Figueirinhas, 1964), 44.

91 Miguel Carvalho, "Preocupa-me a força com que a narrativa do Chega já entra nas escolas," *TSF – A Escuta do Mundo*, 22 December 2025, https://www.tsf.pt/cultura/artigo/miguel-carvalho-preocupa-me-que-a-narrativa-do-chega-ja-entre-nas-escolas/18032758.

last chapter of his book to "today's and tomorrow's voters" – meaning younger people –, we can perceive that the radicalisation is more a matter of social media, where a genuine digital "counter-magisterium" operates. In a word, a decentralised assemblage of influencers, memes, TikTok clips and partisan platforms that reframe history through emotional immediacy rather than analytical depth.[92] In this ecosystem, Chega's message circulates far more rapidly than any curricular reform, shaping the imaginaries of younger audiences in ways that formal education can hardly counterbalance, while simultaneously fostering a sense of cultural grievance that resonates strongly with emerging generations of voters.[93]

Even without formal curriculum changes, teachers and researchers alike are already reporting a growing circulation of radical right narratives in secondary-school classrooms.[94] In some contexts, students openly endorse imperial nostalgia, question the legitimacy of decolonisation, or frame democracy as a fragile and excessive system. Even when inquiry-based pedagogies are used, teachers frequently observe a selective approach to evidence, with some students validating only the sources that confirm their preferred version of the past.[95]

Conclusions

The analysis of Vox and Chega presented in this article demonstrates that the contemporary radical right in Spain and Portugal has transformed the past into a privileged arena of political and epistemic struggle. While the direct impact of these narratives on curricula and class-

92 Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis, *Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online* (New York: Data & Society Research Institute, 2017); Whitney Phillips, *The Oxygen of Amplification: Better Practices for Reporting on Extremists, Antagonists, and Manipulators Online* (New York: Data & Society Research Institute, 2018).

93 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

94 Ricardo Soares, Pedro Ferreira and Carla Malafaia, "Pode a educação atenuar o crescimento do populismo e da extrema-direita? O papel da escolaridade e das experiências educacionais na construção da democracia," *Educação, Sociedade e Cultura* 69 (2024): 1-20, https://doi.org/10.24840/esc.vi69.1127.

95 Miguel Carvalho, *Por Dentro do Chega*, 712.

room practices has so far remained limited, their growing visibility in political, media, and digital spheres reveals an ongoing contest over the social meaning of history and its role in democratic societies. The construction of affectively charged alternative historical imaginaries, most of them grounded on the historical essentialist views of the two Iberian dictatorships, has enabled both parties in a quest to mobilise segments of the population who perceive themselves as culturally displaced or politically unrepresented. In this sense, history is less a field of factual knowledge than a symbolic reservoir through which anxieties about identity, sovereignty, and belonging are expressed and politically instrumentalised.

Despite their different trajectories and institutional contexts, Vox and Chega share a broad set of mnemonic strategies that can be understood as the (re)creation of selected "parallel pasts" designed to legitimise "parallel presents". Both movements recover episodes central to traditional nationalist canons – the medieval *Reconquista*, the imperial expansions of the early modern period, and a somewhat benign authoritarian 20th century – while downplaying episodes of civil conflict, dictatorship and colonial violence, and systemic racism. These selective chronologies produce simplified temporal hierarchies in which the nation is depicted as historically endangered and perpetually in need of redemption, following the thesis of the "palingenetic myth". They also share repertoires across the global radical right, in which historical nostalgia functions as a cultural template for constructing narratives of rise and fall, and decline and regeneration, targeting the external "other" or the internal "woke".

The mechanism does not differ significantly between the two Iberian cases. In Spain, the struggle over the past is essentially institutionalised. Legislative debates over education laws and memory policies, parliamentary interventions, and judicial disputes regarding the Law of Democratic Memory place the state at the centre of the conflict. Vox situates itself as the defender of a threatened national unity, framing school curricula as contaminated by separatist agendas or by left-wing interpretations that, in its view, distort the Franco period, the Civil

War, and the imperial legacy. If it is indeed true that Chega has not primarily operated through legislative reform but through symbolic and mediatised arenas, focusing on parliamentary rhetoric, televised interventions, electoral performances, and digital platforms, the same can be said of Vox. It is worth remembering Santiago Abascal's 2019 video on horseback, highlighting the *Reconquista*. In any case, the main difference lies in Spain's decentralised educational system, which allows autonomous communities with greater Vox influence to exercise greater control over education.

In both national contexts, the radical right portrays history (education) as an ideological tool manipulated by elites (teachers, academics, and cultural institutions), and accuses it of promoting narratives of shame, weakening patriotism, and eroding national cohesion. This discourse rarely engages with concrete curricular frameworks or with historiographical debates. Instead, it mobilises broad moral generalisations: young people are allegedly being indoctrinated; schools are said to humiliate the nation; the democratic period is portrayed as one of decay and cultural relativism. In both countries, the radical right asserts a "freedom to interpret history" that frames expert knowledge as bias and personal or emotional truth as authenticity. This stance reflects not only a political project but also an epistemic posture aligned with broader contemporary trends: the erosion of trust in scientific authority, observable also in climate-change denial, anti-vaccination movements, and other forms of scientific negationism.

Going back to our initial reflections on uses of the past and history education, from a disciplinary standpoint, the Iberian cases confirm that the study of history in school cannot be isolated from the epistemological foundations of academic history. Research in history education points to a growing awareness of the need to promote a history teaching that introduces epistemological conceptions and the methods of the historian in the classroom.[96] As the examples of uses and manip-

96 For more information on Spanish research on history education, see: Gómez Carrasco and Rodríguez Pérez, *La historia como materia formativa*. See also: Jesús Domínguez Castillo, *Pensamiento histórico y evaluación de competencias* (Barcelona: Graó, 2015), and Jorge Sáiz

ulation of history presented in previous pages show, there is a need to reinforce the dialogue between historiographical research and classroom practice, ensuring that students are not only familiar with core content but also with the methods through which historians construct, debate, and revise interpretations. History is not a free exercise in imaginative reconstruction, nor is it a repository of comforting myths. It is a scientific discipline governed by standards of evidence, argumentation, and critique. When public actors claim that all interpretations are equally valid, or that history is merely a matter of opinion, they undermine the very conditions that make historical understanding possible. In this respect, the challenge posed by Vox and Chega is not only political but epistemic. The contrast between the methodological rigour of historical research and the speculative claims made by media commentators, political influencers, or television pundits becomes increasingly stark, as much of the public discourse on the past is shaped by non-experts whose authority derives from visibility rather than methodological expertise.

In this sense, against a backdrop of historical acceleration and increasing presence of AI, this study tried to demonstrate how history, history education, and history teachers may, to some extent, involuntarily find themselves at the centre of a political and ideological struggle. Although they teach history in compliance with national and European guidelines, such as the Reference Framework of Competences for a Democratic Culture,[97] adopting an approach that seeks to move beyond the nationalist essentialism of the 19th and 20th centuries, the reality is that they are facing a resurgence of the old, exclusionary founding myths.

Addressing these questions requires interdisciplinary collaboration among historians, educators, sociologists, political scientists, and

and Ramón López-Facal, "Competencias y narrativas históricas: el pensamiento histórico de estudiantes y futuros profesores españoles de educación secundaria," *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 1, n.º 52 (2015): 87-101.

97 Council of Europe, *Reference Framework of Competences for a Democratic Culture* (Paris: Council of Europe Publishing, 2018).

digital media scholars. It also demands comparative frameworks beyond Iberia to examine how radical right movements across Europe and the Americas mobilise similar repertoires of historical symbolism and memory politics. The analysis offered here lays the groundwork for a broader research agenda, including classroom ethnographies, textbook studies, and comparative analyses of student reception, which may illuminate how young people navigate competing visions of the past in an increasingly polarised public sphere.

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