Gendered issue priorities and the radical-right vote: is there a (mis)match?

Álvaro Calvo, alvaro.rodriguez@udc.es
Mónica Ferrín, monica.ferrin.pereira@udc.es
Universidade da Coruña, Spain

Recent studies emphasise gender attitudes as an explanation for the gender gap in the radical-right vote. However, little is known on whether the (mis)match between the issues that are given the most salience by radical-right parties and (wo)men’s issue priorities accounts for the gender gap in the radical-right vote. Merging a large series of barometers conducted in Spain, including more than 9,000 radical-right voters from January 2020 to March 2023, we find that issue priorities are gendered and that VOX’s support is mainly driven by male issues. Also, importantly, regional nationalism and gender – two of VOX’s flagship issues – affect women’s and men’s probability of voting for VOX differently. These findings indicate that the main determinants of voting for VOX are largely driven by men, not women.

Key words: gender • issue priority/saliency • radical-right vote • VOX • Spain

Key messages
• Issue priorities are gendered, meaning that women and men prioritise different political issues.
• The gendered dimension of political priorities explains part of the gender gap in the radical right vote in Spain.
• VOX’s salient issues – nationalism and gender – are more strongly linked to men’s, rather than women’s, radical-right vote.
• Gendered political socialisation is critical to understand the gender gap in the radical-right vote.

To cite this article: Calvo, A. and Ferrín, M. (2023) Gendered issue priorities and the radical-right vote: is there a (mis)match?, European Journal of Politics and Gender, XX(XX): 1-19, DOI: 10.1332/251510821X16909892610789
Introduction

A typical finding of most research on radical-right (RR) parties is that they are Männerparteien (Mudde, 2007: 90): RR voters in Europe are predominantly men. Previous studies have looked into several factors to explain the gender gap in RR votes. One strand of the literature focuses on women’s and men’s differences in their socio-economic positions. Pointedly, RR support is significantly higher among manual workers, an occupation where men are over-represented (Givens, 2004; Harteveld et al., 2015). Other strands of research argue that women’s and men’s differences in nativist, populist and authoritarian attitudes are the main driver of the gender gap in RR voting (Spierings and Zaslove, 2017). Neither socio-demographic nor attitudinal differences between women and men appear, however, to be sufficient to explain why women are less likely to vote for RR parties than men.

In fact, recent research points to the relevance of an under-studied context-dependent variable to fully account for the different propensities of women and men to vote for RR parties: gender ideology (Campbell and Erzeel, 2018; Lodders and Weldon, 2019; Christley, 2021). For instance, there is evidence that the moderation of RR parties’ stances on gender issues increases the congruence between female voters and RR positions, and acts as a push factor for women’s RR vote, hence reducing the gender gap (Chueri and Damerow, 2022: 11). In addition, the extent to which a country is gender equal is also related to the size of the gender gap in RR votes. In countries scoring low in gender equality, men are less likely to perceive gender issues as a threat and, consequently, less likely to vote for RR parties (Donovan, 2022). To the contrary, the propensity to vote for RR parties increases significantly among men in contexts scoring high in gender equality, especially when gender becomes a salient issue (Off, 2022).

These studies emphasise the prominence of gender ideology as a fundamental component of women’s and men’s RR vote. However, the distinctive political socialisation of women and men entails not only gendered visions of feminism (or anti-feminism) but also different issue positions (Lizotte, 2020) and issue priorities among women and men (Crowder-Meyer, 2022). Previous studies have emphasised the importance of gender differences in political positions to explain the gap in RR vote (Spierings and Zaslove, 2017; Allen and Goodman, 2021), but we know little about whether potential differences in the issues that are prioritised by women and men are related to the RR vote. Is there a (mis)match between the issues that are given the most salience by RR parties and (wo)men’s issue priorities that accounts for the gender gap in RR vote?

Expanding on recent literature supporting the idea that issue priorities are gendered, in this article, we examine whether there is a link between the type of issues that are prioritised by women and men and the gender gap in RR vote. In particular, we argue that the relationship between issue priority and RR vote depends on three aspects: (1) the gender dimension of the issue priority, that is, whether an issue is prioritised mainly by women or by men; (2) the sex of the voter who prioritises female or male issues; and (3) the salience of the issue in the party’s discourse.

We test these assumptions in the Spanish context, where the vote for the RR party VOX is also strongly and consistently gendered in favour of men (Ortega and Montabes, 2021; see also Figure A1 in the Online Appendix). VOX belongs to the family of RR parties because it shares the three fundamental ideological traits defined by Mudde (2007): nativism, populism and authoritarianism (Ferreira, 2019;
Gendered issue priorities and the radical-right vote

In addition, as in other RR parties (see, for example, Akkerman, 2015), gender issues are a characteristic of VOX’s ideology and electoral appeal (Jara et al, 2019; Bernardez-Rodal et al, 2020; Álvarez-Benavides and Aguilar, 2021; López-López and González, 2021; Pichel-Vázquez and Enguix Grau, 2021). VOX’s gender discourse depicts men as the victims of radical feminism, who need protection from the false accusation of being responsible for gender inequalities and from gender-based laws that have harmed the rights of Spanish men (Lara, 2022). This discourse has been shown to play a major role in the electoral success of the Spanish RR (Anduiza and Rico, 2022). The Spanish case differs from other European contexts, however, in the salience of regional nationalism in RR rhetoric. The opposition to Catalan separatism is the most powerful trigger of VOX’s increased support in the 2019 national elections (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Menéndez, 2020) and the main pull factor that attracts votes away from other right-wing parties (Pereira and Maneiro, 2021). VOX supporters tend to be younger and more educated than RR voters elsewhere in Europe, as well as staunch opponents to Catalan nationalism (Turnbull-Dugarte et al, 2020; Rama et al, 2021). The Spanish case is thus particularly interesting for the study of the relationship between issue priority and RR voting from a gendered perspective, as VOX champions both issues that are common to other RR parties in Europe and issues that are specific to the Spanish context.

We use data uniquely suited to test for our hypotheses by merging a large series of barometers from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) from January 2020 to March 2023. This empirical strategy allows us to deal with sample-size problems generally encountered when researching the RR. The results show that issue priority is gendered and that VOX’s support is mainly driven by issues that are most salient to men. Also, and importantly, regional nationalism and gender – two of VOX’s flagship issues – affect women’s and men’s probability of voting for VOX differently. This article further contributes to our knowledge on the gender gap in RR voting by bringing to the fore the relevance of the gendered dimension of issue priorities in party politics.

Gendered issue priorities and voting

Previous studies have emphasised the importance of political attitudes and positions to explain the gender gap in the RR vote. One argument (the mediation hypothesis) is that fewer women than men hold RR parties’ policy positions, yet this argument’s support in previous studies is scarce (see, for example, Immerzeel et al, 2015; Stockemer and Normandin, 2022). An alternative argument is that women and men hold similar policy positions but the relationship between the policy positions and the RR vote differs for women and for men (the moderation hypothesis). For example, support for nativism and authoritarianism is more strongly linked to RR voting among men than among women (Harteveld et al, 2015). Sexist attitudes also tend to have a stronger impact on men’s RR voting than on women’s (Campbell and Erzeel, 2018; Lodders and Weldon, 2019; Allen and Goodman, 2021), especially in contexts where gender equality is given more salience (Donovan, 2022; Off, 2022). A potential explanation of the stronger capacity of policy positions to predict men’s RR vote than women’s is that men might give more salience than do women to the issues that are championed by RR parties. In other words, ‘[t]o the extent that certain issues are less (or more) salient to women than to men, this might lead to differences in the electoral appeal of Populist Radical Right (PRR) parties’ (Harteveld et al, 2015: 105). This line of inquiry
Álvaro Calvo and Mónica Ferrín

is most relevant in relation to the RR and the gender gap, as these parties have benefited in the electoral competition from making salient issues that were generally silenced by mainstream parties (Grindheim, 2019; Dennison and Kriesi, 2023). For example, the salience of immigration boosted RR support (Dennison and Geddes, 2019; Magistro and Wittstock, 2021) and made individuals' policy positions on immigration particularly relevant in their voting choices (Schnaudt and Stecker, 2022). Expanding on previous findings, we explore this idea from a gender lens: are the issues that are made salient by RR parties mainly prioritised by men?

There is extensive literature on gender inequalities in politics, which provides solid grounds to hypothesise that issue priorities are gendered. Women and men are taught to carry out different roles in society, which imply different needs and concerns. Women's and men's political attitudes are a reflection of these differences (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010; Diekman and Schneider, 2010; Quaranta and Dotti Sani, 2018). Hence, women – mainly associated with care – tend to be more interested in political aspects related to welfare and to the local level, which is close to their daily activities (Coffé, 2013; Sánchez-Vitores, 2019). To the contrary, men – mainly associated with agency – are likely to show high levels of interest in party and institutional politics (Campbell and Winters, 2008; Ferrín et al, 2020). Correspondingly, women will tend to prioritise issues related to social and family welfare, equal rights, and equal gender issues, whereas men will tend to give more importance to issues related to party politics, foreign policy and defence spending (Caughell, 2016; Cassese and Barnes, 2019; Lizotte, 2020; Campbell and Shorrocks, 2021; Crowder-Meyer, 2022; Yildirim, 2022). Following recent studies, we posit the following hypothesis for the Spanish context:

H1: Issue priorities are gendered: women are more likely to prioritise issues related to social care and gender; men are more likely to prioritise issues related to party politics and politicians.

Issue-voting theory predicts a relationship between citizens' issue priority, parties' issue ownership or salience, and voting (for a review, see Budge, 2015). If issue priorities are gendered, it is reasonable to think that parties will attract women and men differently, depending on the issues they make most salient in their discourses. Existing evidence points in this direction. The issue priorities of Democrat and Republican voters differ: in general, Democrats are more likely to prioritise female-gendered issues, such as health or poverty, than are Republicans, whereas Republicans are generally more likely than are Democrats to prioritise male-gendered issues, such as terrorism (Yildirim, 2022). Correspondingly, women are more likely to identify as, and vote for, Democrats than are men (Ondercin, 2017). A similar pattern is found in Europe: left-wing parties are more likely to own such issues as education, healthcare, unemployment, family issues and social security than are right-wing parties; right-wing parties tend to prioritise such issues as the economy, taxes, the European Union (EU), law/order, defence, foreign policy and immigration, which are issues that are generally salient to men (Seeberg, 2017). In Europe in recent years too, this seems to correlate with a higher probability that men vote for right-wing parties than do women, though the gender gap varies widely across countries (Shorrocks, 2018). According to Seeberg (2017), RR parties belong to the right-wing category, yet two issues tend to be made particularly salient: immigration (Dennison and Geddes, 2019; Sipma and Berning, 2021) and, increasingly, anti-gender (Kantola and Lombardo, 2020). Whereas gender is typically a female issue
(by opposition, anti-gender should be a male issue), there is very little evidence that immigration is a male-gendered issue (Yildirim, 2022). RR parties thus predominantly emphasise male issues in their discourse. Consequently, we would expect that prioritising male issues relates positively to RR voting, while prioritising female issues relates negatively to RR voting. It should be noted that prioritising an issue owned by a party is not equivalent to being close to the party’s issue position (though see Kustov, 2023). A person might be very close ideologically to the position of an RR party on a specific issue but might still vote for another party because it gives more salience to the issues that they prioritise. Indeed, ‘[e]ven if many people agree with the positions of PRR parties on issues such as crime and immigration, the policy vote model would predict most support for these parties among people who give much weight to these issues’ (Harteveld et al, 2015: 112). Considering that we argue that support for VOX is positively associated with the salience of male issues, men should be more likely to vote for the RR because they perceive that their priorities are best represented by this party family. In other words, we would expect a decrease in the gender gap in the vote for VOX, as men/women should prioritise male/female issues disproportionally more than should women/men. The second hypothesis thus reads:

H2: Female issue priorities are negatively related to the intention to vote for VOX, while male issue priorities are positively related to the intention to vote for VOX.

Since we expect the salience of the policies to vary by gender, it is reasonable to also think that the relationship between issue priority and RR vote will be moderated by the sex of the voter. Existing studies do indeed show that women and men typically prioritise different sets of issues, independently of whether they identify as Democrats or Republicans (Crowder-Meyer, 2022). For example, Democrat and Republican women are equally likely to mention welfare as a salient issue, an issue that is usually attributed to women, whereas both Democrat and Republican men tend to prioritise the economy (Yildirim, 2022: 1252). Remarkably, the gender gap is much larger among Republicans than among Democrats and particularly on issues that are allegedly female (for example, childcare, education, healthcare, welfare and gay rights) or male (for example, gun control and millionaire taxation) (Beall and Barnes, 2020; Barnes et al, 2021; Yildirim, 2022). This larger gap among Republicans might be an indication that men’s right-wing vote is more strongly pushed by male-gendered issues than is women’s and women’s vote is more strongly pulled by female-gendered issues than is men’s. Accordingly, the relationship between issue priority and the RR vote might also be stronger when there is a match between the gender dimension of an issue and the sex of the voter, since women/men will presumably base their vote on female/male issues if these are salient to them. Men who prioritise male issues are thus expected to be more likely to vote for VOX than are women who give salience to male-gendered issues. To the contrary, women who prioritise female issues should be less likely to vote for VOX than are men who think that these issues are relevant. This should particularly be the case when the issue is also salient in the party’s discourse, which is a main predictor of vote choice (Dennison and Geddes, 2019). When the issue is salient at the party level, the link between the RR vote and the gender identification of the issues should be reinforced:
H3a: Female issue priorities are negatively related to the intention to vote for VOX. This effect is stronger for women than for men, especially when the issue is also salient in VOX’s discourse.

H3b: Male issue priorities are positively related to the intention to vote for VOX. This effect is stronger for men than for women, especially when the issue is also salient in VOX’s discourse.

Data and methods

To test our hypotheses, we use data from the CIS. Barometers are conducted monthly, except in August, on a different sample of individuals. The 35 barometers conducted between January 2020 and March 2023 were merged to create a cross-sectional data set including 80,030 respondents who report their voting intention. This empirical strategy allows us to work with an unusually large sample of individuals who identify with the RR (see, for example, Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019) and a sufficient number of answers to estimate the relationship between issue priorities and voting (for the use of a similar strategy, see Crowder-Meyer, 2022).

Since we are interested in capturing respondents’ support for VOX at the moment they mention their issue priorities, and those might change over time (Dennison, 2019), we use intention to vote for VOX as the dependent variable instead of vote recall in the last election (for a similar strategy, see Sipma and Berning, 2021; Anduiza and Rico, 2022). The variable takes the value of 1 for respondents who report that they would vote for VOX and 0 for respondents who mention any other party. Individuals who did not report any party were omitted from the analysis. In total, 9,269 respondents declared their intention to vote for VOX.

The main independent variables are respondents’ issue priorities. Following previous studies, the most important problem(s) in the country mentioned by the respondents are taken as a match for their issue priorities (Jennings and Wlezien, 2011; Heffington et al, 2019; Crowder-Meyer, 2022; Yildirim, 2022). The open-ended most-important-problems question is asked in every barometer: ‘In your opinion, what is the most important problem today in Spain?’ Respondents are given the opportunity to voice up to three problems they consider the most important. The answer to the question is transcribed literally by the interviewers and coded afterwards by the survey agency according to pre-established categories. If the answer does not fit any of the pre-established categories, it is assigned a new code. To create the independent variables, we follow Singer’s (2011) classification. Each category was classified initially according to one of 18 issue areas. For example, mentions of ‘health’ or ‘education’ are classified as social policies. We reduced the number of issue areas from 18 to 13, as issue areas that were mentioned by less than 2 per cent of the sample were included in ‘other issues’ (crime, foreign policy/defence, environment, taxes and agriculture). The coding resulted in 13 dichotomous variables corresponding to the following issue areas: unemployment, regional nationalism, social policies, economy, corruption, politicians/parties, immigration, gender, values, government, COVID-19, democracy and other issues. Each variable takes the value of 1 if the respondent reported an issue belonging to a specific area as one of the three most important problems and 0 if no issue was reported in this area. Coding is only based on the topic that is prioritised.
by respondents and not on any ideological or other directional preference because the pre-established categories did not allow for such refined coding. A potential bias against finding support for our hypotheses relates to the fact that the period analysed partly coincides in time with the COVID-19 pandemic, which shifted people’s attention from other contested issues (almost 25 per cent of the respondents mentioned COVID-19 as the most important problem). More details on the specific coding of the issue areas and its comparison with Singer’s classification can be found in Table A1 in the Online Appendix. On average, women mentioned significantly fewer issues than did men (women = 2.52; men = 2.56) and were also significantly more likely than men to have answered ‘Don’t know’ to this question (0.8 per cent more women [2.5 per cent] than men [1.7 per cent] did not mention any issue).

The other main independent variable is the sex of the respondents, which takes the value of 1 if the respondent is coded by the interviewer as a woman and 0 if the respondent is coded as a man. The standard measure of left–right ideological self-placement on a scale that goes from 1 (the extreme left) to 10 (the extreme right) is used as a proxy for ideology. In addition, following previous studies (Harteveld et al, 2015; Turnbull-Dugarte et al, 2020; Ortega and Montabes, 2021), we control for the occupation of the respondents, the cohort the respondents belong to, the education level of the respondents, the marital status of the respondents, the religious denomination with which the respondents identify and the level of satisfaction with their personal economic situation (five-point scale from 1 [‘very bad situation’] to 5 [‘very good situation’]) (Table A2 in the Online Appendix presents information on all variables).

H3 predicts that the moderating effect of sex on issue priority is stronger for the issues that are given most salience by VOX. To identify these issues, we use data from the 2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (for 2020) and the Regional Manifesto Project (RMP) (for 2019). Table A3 in the Online Appendix shows VOX’s issue salience. Although it is not possible to fully replicate at the party level the issues that are prioritised by the respondents, the combination of several sources allows for a fair representation of VOX’s discourse. Data show that, compared to other parties that compete in the right-wing space in Spain, VOX’s three flagship issues are regional nationalism, gender and immigration (for concordant findings, see Bernardez-Rodal et al, 2020; Mendes and Dennison, 2021).

Considering the multilevel nature of the data, we use three-level multilevel logistic modelling to estimate the effect of the main independent variables on the intention to vote for VOX, with individuals nested in autonomous communities (the regional level) and autonomous communities grouped by barometer. All analyses have been replicated with logistic regression analysis, with errors clustered by autonomous communities, and the results are robust.

Results

The guiding assumption of this article is that issue priorities are gendered. This is confirmed in Table 1, which shows the percentage of women (Column 2) and men (Column 3) who reported issues related to each of the 13 policy areas. Column 4 in Table 1 presents differences between the percentage of women and the percentage of men and their statistical significance. In line with early research, women in Spain are significantly more likely to prioritise social policies (including unemployment) and gender than are men. Women are also more likely than are men to mention problems
related to COVID-19. Men, on the other hand, tend to give more importance to issues related to party and institutional politics: politicians, corruption, government and democracy. Particular to the Spanish context, ‘regional nationalism’ is mentioned by a substantive percentage of people as an issue priority (4.4 per cent), and most importantly, this issue priority is significantly gendered: 3.5 per cent more men than women mention issues related to regional nationalism (for concordant findings, see Johns et al, 2012). There are no significant differences between women and men in relation to the issues of values, immigration and the economy. Table 1 thus confirms our expectations that women and men tend to prioritise different issues (H1). It also shows that one of VOX’s salient issues is predominantly masculine (regional nationalism), whereas gender is predominantly prioritised by women.

Table 2 presents estimates of the relationship between gendered issue priorities and voting intention (see Table A4 in the Online Appendix). Model 1 in Table 2 provides the coefficient of the sex of the respondent with all controls. Model 2 introduces the 13 issue priorities in addition to the controls and the sex of the respondent. Considering that one of the main limitations of the data is that they do not allow for controlling for issue position, Model 2 also includes the left–right scale as a proxy of the ideological position of the respondents. Table 2 confirms the existence of a gender gap in the vote for the RR in Spain, as the coefficient is negative and significant in the two models. It also confirms previous findings on the Spanish case, as VOX supporters tend to be younger and higher educated than RR voters elsewhere in Europe (Montabes and Cazorla, 2021). Manual workers and the military are significantly more likely to vote for VOX than managing directors, and religion is a significant predictor of support for VOX (Turnbull-Dugarte et al, 2020; Ortega and Montabes, 2021; López-López and González, 2021; Heyne and Manucci, 2021). Finally, the more an individual positions themselves to the right of the ideological scale, the more likely it is that they intend to vote for VOX.

### Table 1: Gendered issue priorities in Spain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Priority</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
<th>Difference (% women – % men)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social policies</td>
<td>39.05</td>
<td>28.65</td>
<td>10.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>41.33</td>
<td>40.44</td>
<td>0.88*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>24.58</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>0.58**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>43.00</td>
<td>43.91</td>
<td>-0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>7.96</td>
<td>-1.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>-1.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other issues</td>
<td>12.99</td>
<td>14.44</td>
<td>-1.45***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>-1.57***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional nationalism</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>-3.55***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians/parties</td>
<td>40.25</td>
<td>48.24</td>
<td>-7.99***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Differences statistically significant at: * p < 0.1; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001. These p-values are drawn from logit models predicting the mention of each issue priority, controlling for sex, age and education. All data are weighted.
H2 hypothesised that female issue priorities are negatively related to the intention to vote for VOX, whereas male issue priorities are positively related. According to Table 1, we would expect that the relationships between intention to vote for VOX and social policies, gender, COVID-19 and unemployment are negative, whereas the relationships between intention to vote for VOX and politicians/parties, regional nationalism, corruption, government and democracy are positive. Model 2 in Table 2 confirms our expectation. Only four issue priorities are negatively related to voting for VOX, which are the female ones: social policies, gender, unemployment and COVID-19. To the contrary, all male issue priorities are positively related to the intention to vote for VOX. In addition, mentioning immigration and values as an issue priority is positively related to the intention to vote for VOX, though we found no gender differences in the salience of immigration and values in our sample. Saliency of the economy does not relate significantly with support for VOX, as predicted by previous studies (Sipma and Berning, 2021). Also as expected, including issue priorities in Model 2 significantly reduces the coefficient of the sex variable (the odds of a woman stating their intention to vote for VOX changes from 0.454 in Model 1 to 0.481 in Model 2), which is an indication that the fact that issue priorities are

Table 2: Multilevel logistic regression: the relationship between issue priorities and intention to vote for VOX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue priority</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman (ref: man)</td>
<td>-0.789*** (0.0299)</td>
<td>-0.732*** (0.0293)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: unemployment</td>
<td>-0.191*** (0.0223)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: regional nationalism</td>
<td>0.414*** (0.0500)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: social</td>
<td>-0.0750** (0.0367)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: economy</td>
<td>0.00421 (0.0348)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: corruption</td>
<td>0.417*** (0.0720)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: politicians/parties</td>
<td>0.323*** (0.0390)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: immigration</td>
<td>1.155*** (0.0647)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: gender</td>
<td>-0.367*** (0.0921)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: values</td>
<td>0.348*** (0.0830)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: government</td>
<td>0.990*** (0.0464)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: COVID-19</td>
<td>-0.115*** (0.0426)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: democracy</td>
<td>0.543*** (0.0909)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue priority: other</td>
<td>0.0980** (0.0488)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1.
gendered contributes to explaining why women are less likely to vote for VOX than men. Table A5 in the Online Appendix, without ideological position as a control, shows that prioritising certain issues – particularly gender and government – might be linked to a specific issue position, as the magnitude of the coefficients is larger than in Model 2 of Table 2 (see also Kustov, 2023). However, results are robust even when controlling for the ideological position of the respondents and support the idea that part of the gap in RR voting in Spain originates in the fact that women and men prioritise different issues and that these relate differently to voting for the RR.7

H3 presumes that the relationship between issue priority and voting will be moderated by the sex of the respondent. As an initial test, we segment the sample by the sex of the respondents and replicate Model 2 in Table 2 for women and for men (see Table A6 in the Online Appendix). As can be seen, the results seem to contradict our hypotheses, as the coefficients – either positive or negative – of the issue priorities are generally stronger for men than for women, independently of whether the issue is female or male gendered. H3 also predicts that the moderating effect of sex on issue priority is stronger for the issues that are given most salience in VOX discourse, depending on whether these issues have a clear gender dimension. Considering that there are no significant differences in the likelihood of mentioning immigration as a priority, we expect H3 to apply only to regional nationalism and gender. The coefficients of regional nationalism and gender are, however, larger for men than for women in Table A6 in the Online Appendix, which contradicts H3a.

As an additional test, we replicate Model 2 in Table 2, including: an interaction term between regional nationalism and sex (Model 1 in Table A7 in the Online Appendix); an interaction term between gender and sex (Model 2 in Table A7 in the Online Appendix); and, for the sake of comparison with a gender-neutral issue, an interaction term between immigration and sex (Model 3 in Table A7 in the Online Appendix). To ease the interpretation of results, Figures 1, 2 and 3 display the predicted probabilities that women and men will vote for VOX depending on whether regional nationalism (see Figure 1), gender (see Figure 2) or immigration (see Figure 3) are mentioned as issue priorities.

As shown in Table A7 in the Online Appendix, the interaction term between regional nationalism and sex is negative but not significant. Figure 1 suggests, however, that prioritising regional nationalism relates more strongly to support for VOX among men than among women. The probability that a man supports VOX increases significantly if regional nationalism is included among his priorities, twice as much as the probability that a woman’s support for VOX increases if she mentions regional nationalism as her issue priority. Not only is regional nationalism an issue predominantly mentioned by men, but it seems to be more strongly related to men’s intention to vote for VOX than to women’s (H3b).

Regarding gender, the interaction term is not in the expected direction, nor does it reach statistical significance (see Table A7 in the Online Appendix). Contrary to H3a, Figure 2 shows that women who prioritise gender are not significantly less likely to vote for VOX than women who do not mention gender as a salient issue. It is instead men’s choices that seem to be driven most strongly by gender issues, either in supporting or in opposing VOX. Men who consider gender an issue priority are significantly less likely to vote for VOX than men who do not mention it as a priority. This is the only group of men who do not differ significantly from women, as shown by the overlap in the confidence intervals. Prioritising
Gender as an issue is thus a crucial pull factor for men. Women are less likely to vote for VOX, in part, because they give more saliency to gender as an issue, but this apparently does not imply that their voting choices are more strongly affected by it than are men’s.

Immigration is another of the most salient issues in VOX discourse, though this issue is not gendered. Accordingly, we do not expect the relationship between prioritising immigration and voting intention to vary by the sex of the respondent. Figure 3 confirms this expectation, as both women and men who prioritise immigration issues are significantly more likely to vote for VOX than are women and men who do not mention immigration as a salient issue. Immigration is not only one of the strongest mobilisers of the RR vote in Spain (Rama et al., 2021) and elsewhere (Dennison and Geddes, 2019; Mendes and Dennison, 2021) but also an issue that mobilises women and men equally. These results indicate that the gender dimension of an issue priority is most relevant in explaining gender differences in the vote for the RR, especially if it is also salient at the party level. This idea also finds support in Table A7 and Figure A3 in the Online Appendix. First, the effect of mentioning unemployment, social issues, economy, politicians/parties, government and COVID-19 as an issue priority on the intention to vote for VOX is roughly identical for women and men. Although these issues have a gendered dimension, they are not salient in VOX’s discourse. In addition, prioritising democracy and corruption – both male-gendered issues – appears to influence more men’s RR vote than women’s. Democracy is not as salient for VOX as immigration, regional nationalism and gender, but Table A3 in the Online Appendix shows that VOX clearly distances itself from its main competitor Partido Popular (PP) on that specific issue, with a frame that evokes nostalgia from the pre-democratic regime (see Zanotti and Rama Caamaño, 2022). Finally, prioritising values seems a strong push for men’s RR vote and not for women’s, an issue that is also more salient for VOX than for other parties (see Table A3 in the Online Appendix).
Even if the issue of values is not gendered, this finding might mirror the relationship between prioritising gender as an issue and the intention to vote for VOX.

**Conclusion**

The main argument of this article is that the gendered dimension of issue priorities contributes to understanding the gender gap in the RR vote. Departing from the suspicion of previous studies that findings of a stronger relationship between policy positions and RR votes for men than for women might be related to the fact that men might give more salience to the issues that are championed by RR parties (Harteveld et al, 2015), we investigate whether issue priorities are indeed gendered and, as such, differently related to the RR vote.

The findings for the Spanish case confirm our expectations. Issue priorities are gendered and the intention to vote for VOX relates differently to the gender dimension of those issues. Issues that are mainly prioritised by women are negatively related to votes for VOX, whereas issues that are mainly prioritised by men are positively related to the intention to vote for VOX. In part, the gendered nature of the issue priorities helps explain the gender gap in RR voting in the Spanish context. Most importantly, the issues that are most salient in VOX’s discourse are stronger pushers/pullers of men’s vote than of women’s, especially when the issue has a clear gender dimension. Men who prioritise regional nationalism are significantly more likely to vote for VOX than men who do not prioritise it. Also, contrary to our expectations, the probability that men who mention gender as an issue priority vote for VOX is significantly lower than for men who do not mention it, whereas prioritising gender does not make any difference in women’s vote.
Our findings thus indicate that the main determinants of voting for VOX are largely driven by men, not women. On the one hand, since RR parties tend to mobilise around issues that are predominantly male, they seem to be better able to attract men than women. On the other hand, men who prioritise female issues are strongly dissuaded from voting for VOX, even if their position on gender issues aligns with the party’s, as shown by the exploratory analyses included in this article. These results line up with existing evidence that issue positions, particularly those related to gender (Lodders and Weldon, 2019; Off, 2022), are a better predictor of men’s RR vote than of women’s. Our findings point to several avenues for further research. First, data limitations in this study have impeded a full understanding of how gendered issue priorities interact with women’s and men’s issue positions. Accounting for both issue positions and priorities might contribute to interpreting the still-unexplained gender gap in our results. Second, we have shown that there is a link between the gendered dimension of issue priorities and the RR vote, yet causality cannot be assessed with cross-sectional data, nor the extent to which voters update their issue priorities in response to the RR discourse. Finally, future studies should examine whether our findings travel well to other contexts, especially those where gender issues are not as salient in RR discourses as they are in Spain.

Notes
1 ‘Gender ideology’ generally refers to ‘the ideological matrix of the different reforms they try to oppose, which pertain to intimate/sexual citizenship debates, including LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans] rights, reproductive rights, and sex and gender education’ (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018: 8).
2 Weights have been applied to all the analyses to correct for territorial imbalances derived from the merging of data.
To test for potential biases related to the fact that women are less likely to provide an answer to survey questions on voting choice than men (17.2 per cent of women in our sample provided a ‘Don’t know’ answer, as compared to 11.5 per cent of men, with the differences being statistically significant at $p < 0.000$), we have estimated multinomial regression models with an alternative dependent variable that takes the value of 2 if respondents answer ‘Don’t know’ or ‘Don’t answer’ to the question about voting intention. Results are robust.

Some exceptions apply to the Spanish case: (1) unemployment is an issue area, as the percentage of unemployed people in Spain is one of the highest in Europe; (2) politicians/parties are coded as a separate issue, as it is the second most important problem in Spain; and (3) to fit the objectives of the article, regional nationalism and gender are separate issue areas.

It is unfortunate that a more inclusive understanding of gender was not available in the existing data.

The difference between the coefficient of ‘woman’ in Model 1 and the coefficient of ‘woman’ in Model 2 is statistically significant at $p < 0.000$. Differences are estimated with the ‘suest’ command in Stata.

To assess potential biases in the results derived from the lack of data of the respondents’ position in each of the issues prioritised, we replicated the analyses of Table 2 with Barometer 3395 (February 2023), which contains an item that proxies respondents’ position on the gender issue. With few exceptions, the results match Table 2, and both issue priorities and issue position relate negatively and significantly to vote for VOX (see Table A8 in the Online Appendix). Interestingly, an interaction term between gender issue position and gender issue priority indicates that the issue position is only relevant for respondents who do not consider that gender is an issue priority. Most importantly, the interaction effect is essentially driven by men, confirming the main findings of this article. These exploratory results speak in favour of the relevance of gendered issue priorities in explaining the gender gap in RR votes (see Table A9 and Figure A2 in the Online Appendix).

Funding
This work was supported by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation under Grant PID2020-115568RB-I00 and by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation and the European Social Fund under Grant PRE2021-097754.

Acknowledgements
The authors are very grateful to the editor and the three anonymous reviewers.

Author biographies
Álvaro Calvo is a PhD student and a predoctoral researcher at Universidade da Coruña (UDC), Spain.

Mónica Ferrín is Ramón y Cajal fellow at Universidade da Coruña (UDC), Spain.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

References


Álvaro Calvo and Mónica Ferrín


