Educational Horizons in the Face of the Rise of the "New Far Right" in Europe: A Documentary Analysis

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Abstract: Due to the emergence of the "new far right" in Europe, and the consolidation of its parliamentary representation in European and national instances of these parties, this paper uses documentary analysis to examine the education policy proposals of four political organizations: Alternative for Germany (Germany), National Association (France), Northern League (Italy) and VOX (Spain). After identifying the common elements of these political parties, in order to systematize and collect the data, an analysis matrix was designed based on an exhaustive bibliographic review of the issue. The results reflect some lines of convergence between "new far-right" organizations in relation to nationalism, the role of education in the society, and xenophobic and anti-immigration speech. Thus, the results show the four parties converge on the following themes: (i) an emphasis on the role of the education system to perpetuate and legitimize the hegemonic culture and reinforce the national identity of its citizens; and (ii) a neutral discourse, however, with a hidden yet marked anti-immigrant, specifically anti-Muslim, character, legitimized by arguments defending national security, the image of the traditional family, the equity of gender, the secular school, and the guarantee of national freedoms. From these results, it can be concluded that

a common political agenda in education exists between the parties of the "new far-right" in Europe, which entails a serious threat for historically vulnerable sectors, as well as immigrant populations.
Key words: education policy; Europe; political parties; documentary analysis; far-right politics

Horizontes educativos ante el auge de la "nueva extrema derecha" en Europa: Un análisis documental

Resumen: Ante la irrupción de la "nueva extrema derecha" europea, y la consolidación de su representación parlamentaria tanto en instancias europeas como específicamente nacionales de estos partidos, este artículo analiza las propuestas en materia de política educativa de cuatro de estas organizaciones políticas. De esta manera, la metodología empleada fue el Análisis Documental, tomando como objeto de estudio los programas electorales de Alternativa para Alemania (Alemania), Agrupación Nacional (Francia), Liga Norte (Italia) y VOX (España). Después de identificar los elementos comunes de estos partidos políticos, en pos de desarrollar la sistematización de los datos recogidos, se elaboró una matriz de análisis a partir de una exhaustiva revisión bibliográfica sobre la cuestión. Los resultados reflejan algunas líneas de convergencia entre las organizaciones de "nueva extrema derecha" en relación con el nacionalismo, al papel de la educación en la sociedad y su marcado carácter xenófobo y antiinmigración. De este modo, los resultados muestran que: (i) los cuatro partidos convergen al señalar que el sistema educativo debe perpetuar y legitimar la cultura hegemónica y reforzar la identidad nacional de sus ciudadanos; (ii) a través de la neutralización del discurso, sin embargo, se esconde un marcado carácter antiinmigrante — específicamente anti–musulmán—, sirviéndose de la defensa de la seguridad nacional, la familia tradicional y las libertades nacionales. A partir de estos resultados, se puede concluir que existe una agenda política común en materia educativa entre los partidos de la "nueva extrema derecha" europea, la cual supone una seria amenaza para los sectores históricamente vulnerables, así como para la población inmigrante.
Palabras clave: política educativa; Europa; partido político; análisis documental; extrema derecha

Horizontes educacionais face à ascensão da "nova extrema direita" na Europa: Uma análise documental

Resumo: Com o aparecimento da "nova extrema direita" europeia, e com a sua consolidação na representação parlamentar tanto nas instâncias europeias como, especificamente, nacionais desses partidos, este artigo analisa as propostas de política educacional de quatro dessas organizações políticas. Desta forma, a metodologia utilizada foi a Análise Documental, tomando como objeto de estudo os programas eleitorais da Alternativa para a Alemanha (Alemanha), Grupo Nacional (França), Liga Norte (Itália) e VOX (Espanha). Após a identificação dos elementos comuns a estes partidos políticos, a fim de desenvolver a sistematização dos dados recolhidos, foi elaborada uma matriz de análise a partir de uma exaustiva revisão bibliográfica sobre o tema. Os resultados refletem algumas linhas de convergência entre as organizações da "nova extrema direita" em relação ao nacionalismo, o papel da educação na sociedade e seu marcado caráter xenófobo e anti-imigração. Os resultados mostram que: (i) os quatro partidos convergem ao apontar que o sistema educacional deve perpetuar e legitimar a cultura hegemônica e reforçar a identidade nacional de seus cidadãos; (ii) através da neutralização do discurso, porém, oculta-se um marcado caráter anti-imigrante - especificamente anti-muçulmano -, valendo-se da defesa da segurança nacional, da família tradicional e das liberdades nacionais. Com base nesses resultados, pode-se concluir que existe uma agenda política comum na educação entre os partidos da "nova extrema direita" na Europa, que representa uma grave ameaça a setores historicamente vulneráveis, bem como à população imigrante.
Palavras-chave: política educacional; Europa; partido político; análise documentária; extrema direita

Educational Horizons in the Face of the Rise of the "New Far Right" in Europe: A Documentary Analysis

Overview of the "New Far Right" in Europe

It's been some time since the growth of the far right, its increasing parliamentary representation, and its presence in the governments of certain European countries ceased to surprise us. However, even though we might normalize such a situation, we must not lose sight of the danger this trend poses. The normalization of specific scenarios and actors "prevents the detection of an intrusive radical ideology that has now become the norm" (Stanley, 2019, p. 176), or at least its upward trend. In this sense, we must be aware that the far right has been gaining more parliamentary representation with each election. But to understand the significance of what we are about to discuss, we must first provide a general overview of the presence of the far right throughout Europe in the historical moment we find ourselves in—before even referencing the composition of the European Parliament following the latest European elections in May 2019.

In this context, there are many fears that, according to their historical background, loom in the European social imaginary concerning the far right. Hence, this context requires the task of unmasking, rather than dismissing, the complex ideological and programmatic nature of such political parties (Fraser, 2017; Guamán et al., 2019; Melzer, 2017). Given the concerning panorama of the far right in Europe (Martínez, 2018), present in 17 out of the 28 parliaments of various European Union countries and holding a 20% representation in the European Parliament, we cannot help but acknowledge the necessity of revealing the danger of this scenario.

If we closely examine the political landscape of the various countries comprising the European Union, we can discern that the far right is unevenly represented. There are countries where the far right is currently part of the national government, such as in the cases of Poland—where the Law and Justice Party was the leading political force in 2015 with 37.6% of the votes—and Hungary—where Viktor Orbán's Hungarian Civic Alliance and the Jobbik party, the Movement for a Better Hungary, garnered 49.27% and 19.06% of the votes, respectively. Additionally, there are cases like: Switzerland, where the Swiss People's Party holds the foremost position in the National Council with 29.4% of the votes; Austria, where the Austrian Freedom Party, with 26.6% of the votes, ranks as the third political force and is currently in the government; Denmark, where the Danish People's Party supports the national government as the second force, with 21.1% of the votes; Sweden, where the Sweden Democrats are the third national political force with 17.6% of the votes; or Germany, where the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party ranks as the third political force with 12.6% of the votes. Of course, the cases of Italy and France are well known. On one side, we have Marine Le Pen leading the National Rally (RN)—formerly the National Front—a far-right organization that in the 2017 presidential elections became the second most voted force in France with 21.3% of the votes. On the other hand, Italy has the Northern League party, where until September 2019 Matteo Salvini served as deputy prime minister and Minister of the Interior of the Italian government, positioned as the second most voted political force, with a percentage of 17.4%. Likewise, no less concerning is the case of the Spanish far right, where VOX has entered the national parliament as the third political force, with 15.1% of the votes.

It is worth noting that, although this article does not aim to address the global rise of far-right party presence in governments and parliaments worldwide, we cannot ignore cases in Latin American countries like Brazil—with Jair Bolsonaro at the helm—or Bolivia, where their respective

governments stand out for their explicitly militaristic nature (Ramas, 2019; Solano, 2018). Also, the case of the United States, with a president who increasingly reinforces a xenophobic and imperialistic discourse, whose administration maintains contact with parties of the European "new far right," such as VOX, as well as with Marine Le Pen's National Rally, through former White House Chief Strategist under President Trump, Steve Bannon. Thus, even though this article will not conduct an analysis of the field as a coordinated block of political organizations, we cannot help but acknowledge the affinities that exist among different far-right parties both at the European and international levels.

Nevertheless, in light of this at the very least alarming panorama, the immediate question we must pose is: what is happening with the far-right representation in European institutions? Well, if we take a look at the results of the latest elections to the European Parliament, held between May 23 and 26, 2019, the first thing we will notice when analyzing the results in the European Parliament - by country- is that a total of 21 far-right parties have seats in the European Parliament, solidifying the rightward shift in the composition of the European Parliament. We find a total of 139 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) out of the 705 that make up the chamber, coming from parties of the new far right and ultra-conservatives. This accounts for the recomposition of the European Parliament after the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, grouped under two political groups: Identity and Democracy, with 76 members and including parties like the National Rally, Alternative for Germany, or the Northern League; and European Conservatives and Reformists, with 61 members, including parties like VOX or Law and Justice. Additionally, within the non-affiliated group, we find the two MEPs from the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn. This means nearly 20% of parliamentary representation, which signifies an increase of five percentage points compared to the configuration of the European Parliament in the 2014-2019 period, during which the far right held 15% of parliamentary strength.

Regardless, the upward trend of the far right's incursion within European institutions is consolidating. Therefore, in light of the election results—both at the national and European levels—it becomes imperative to thoroughly address the policy proposals of these political parties. Education plays a significant role in these proposals, given that since the inception of national educational systems, they have always responded to an explicitly political purpose: to shape a specific model of citizen. Thus, the educational programs of what we will now refer to as the European "new far right" serve as a relevant source of information for understanding the direction of the ideological principles that will guide different national and European projects in the future. From them emanate the deepest and most ingrained values of their ideological proposal, as education is often conceived as a political instrument that must respond to the particular interests of national governments, which seek to perpetuate and solidify their worldview.

In conclusion, the primary goal of this article is to critically analyze the educational proposals of four parties of the European "new far right," in order to determine whether a common educational agenda exists among these parties and to understand the challenges that the consolidation of their presence poses for the European Union.

Theoretical Framework

The Rise of the "New Far Right" in Europe: Ghosts of the Past?

The historical and ideological connections between the "new far right" (Ignazi, 2003) and the traditional far right that hasn't severed ties with classical fascist movements are evident.

However, in line with Mudde's proposition (2007), there's a point of rupture in this relationship, as the "new far right" is "[...] (nominally) democratic, although they oppose some fundamental values of liberal democracies, while the far right is essentially anti-democratic, opposing the fundamental principle of popular sovereignty" (p. 31). Thus, they can only be seen as two distinct families of parties (Goodwin, 2007).

According to the analysis proposed by Antón-Mellón and Hernández-Carr (2016), throughout the recent history of the old continent, the "new far right" has gone through various phases to reach its current consolidated configuration. In the initial stage, starting from the beginning 1980s, political parties of this ideological sector maintained secondary positions with support ranging from 10% to 15% of the votes (Akkerman, 2018). At that historical moment, the rest of the parliamentary political forces in different European countries were deeply reluctant to show support or form coalitions with these exclusionary movements. In the second phase, which we could place in the 1990s, the evolution of the "new far right" parties shifted towards the emergence of new formations of this type. Additionally, "the progressive electoral growth of these parties and their stability within their respective political systems undermined the consideration of them as marginal parties and/or unsuitable for entering government pacts and coalitions" (Antón-Mellón & Hernández-Carr, 2016, p. 18). We must emphasize that, in this second period, Spain seemed to remain apart from this trend. However, around 2002, a turning point occurred in other nearby European countries: the National Front's access to the second round of the French presidential elections and the entry into their respective national governments of parties like the Italian Northern League, the Austrian Freedom Party, or the Danish People's Party.

Finally, we can outline a third stage that begins with the global economic crisis of 2008 and the widespread lack of trust in institutions. Two factors we must necessarily add are the victories of some "new far right" parties: the well-known incursion of the declared neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn in Greece (with 9.3% of the votes) and the decisive victory of the French National Front in the May 2014 European elections (with 25.4% of the votes). Although the expansion and consolidation of most far-right political parties occurred prior to the economic, social, and political crisis of 2008, it's undeniable that the crisis presented an opportunity for previously unimaginable events (Antón-Mellón & Hernández-Carr, 2016; Sanahuja, 2017; Torreblanca, 2014). In line with Montoya's argument (2017), "the crisis that Europe and the rest of the world have been experiencing since 2008 has brought back, with greater force than could have been foreseen, exclusionary ideologies in many countries on the continent" (p. 57).

In this sense, it seems evident that, as Guamán et al. (2019) propose, there is a dialectical connection between the increase of far-right or neo-fascist forces and the crises and recompositions of capitalism—in this case financial—as well as "with the increase in dynamics of accumulation by dispossession, violence, moral conservatism, sexism, xenophobia, racism, and with the latent discontent in societies after its eruption" (p. 11). This point is significant if we understand that, in line with the theory of Benjamin, Adorno, or Horkheimer, belonging to the Frankfurt School, it's not possible to address the far right and its historically recursive ascent without connecting it to the capitalist order and its crises. Thus, in the current global political landscape, a close link between the rise of the European "new far right" and the exacerbation of neoliberalism's contradictions in recent years is evident. This must be combined with an international context of radical individualism and cutthroat competitiveness. This connection aligns with what Fraser (2017) has referred to as the "end of progressive neoliberalism," what Fassin (2018) has termed the "neo-fascist moment of neoliberalism," or what Ramas (2019) has conceptualized as "authoritarian neoliberals." This is

essentially the convergence of neoliberalism as an economic system, the rise of social authoritarianism, and a deepening of moral reactionary tendencies. As an example, in line with Polo's proposition (2019), some of the political organizations of the "new far right" have explicitly and openly neoliberal economic programs, such as Bolsonaro in Brazil or the VOX party in Spain. The author asserts that the aim of these organizations is to "reinforce and consolidate the economic status quo, overtly defending the privileges of the powerful" (pp. 58-59).

Therefore, cases that might initially appear as individual exceptions—like the French National Front, the Italian Northern League, or AfD—are of vital importance when conducting a general analysis of the rise of the European "new far right." The advancement of each of these parties carries significance that transcends the national territory in which they are situated. Next, we will see that if there's one thing characterizing these formations in their search for a common enemy, it's the urgent need to articulate their discourse around nationalism, xenophobia, populism, and authoritarianism.

Some Lines of Convergence in the Pursuit of a Common Enemy

On one hand, a point of convergence among all the political parties of the European "new far right" that we will address in this work is their nationalist orientation. These parties, in some cases ultra-nationalist, explicitly defend constructs and values supposedly unique to the hegemonic national culture (Antón-Mellón & Hernández-Carr, 2016). An exaggerated and exclusionary nationalism driven by a xenophobic sentiment against immigration (Akkerman, 2018; Akkerman et al., 2016; Aragoneses, 2019; Melzer, 2017; Montoya, 2017), with immigrants being accused of jeopardizing national cultural and political identity. Thus, building on the previous point, these formations maintain a clearly "nativist" stance. Nativism is understood as an ideological construct through which the aim is to "sustain the idea that states should be exclusively inhabited by members of the native group—the 'nation'—and where non-native elements—people and ideas—are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state" (Mudde, 2007, p. 17). Accordingly, as Michaels (1995) puts it, "the essence of nativism is its preference for the native exclusively because it is native" (p. 14). In this sense, the foundation for determining nativity (or lack thereof) is diverse: ethnic, racial, religious, economic... but it will always have, as it should, a cultural component (Bennett, 1990). It's worth noting that this issue is rooted, as we can observe, in a racism that unveils an "us" versus "them" mentality, albeit veiled. As Aragoneses (2019) states, "defining the other defines the own community; pointing out enemies also marks the boundary between 'us' and 'them'" (p. 125).

Thus, when it comes to understanding the "new far right" parties regarding the issue of discriminating against "the other," we should consider whether it's based on principles of racism or, on the contrary, if it's related to other factors like the class extraction of migrant communities. The use of nativism as a focal point for the convergence of the "new far right" is rooted in the need to complicate the dichotomy between racist and non-racist parties. "While nativism might include racist arguments, it can also be non-racist [...]. Nativism doesn't reduce parties to single-issue parties, as the term anti-immigrant does" (Mudde, 2007, p. 19). In any case, this term—like nationalism—has been used to refer to a widespread attitude in society that rejects foreign people or cultures. In contrast to the explicitly racist stance of traditional fascism and far-right ideologies, the "new far right" conducts a shift, at least seemingly, in the focus of discrimination: race is replaced by culture to carry out a rejection of interculturalism.

On the other hand, another axis of convergence among the "new far right" political parties we're discussing is the "populist" character associated with nationalism and nativism (Akkerman et al., 2016; Alcaro & Tocci, 2018; Antón-Mellón & Hernández-Carr, 2016). Right-wing populism, which we've preferred to conceptualize as the "new far right," employs terms like "people," "country," "nation," to delineate a differentiated and exclusionary national community. This stance, in line with Montoya (2017) and Melzer (2017), constructs a discourse based on fear, conservatism, xenophobia, anti-establishment sentiment, and a strong anti-European sentiment—adding to the elements mentioned earlier. Furthermore, within the ideological battle pursued by the "new far right" parties in their discursive configuration, there's an explicit intention to be the "sole and absolute representatives of a 'people' defined in a homogeneous manner" (Melzer, 2017, p. 92), referring to the supposed "general sentiment" of the population. Right-wing populism doesn't operate so much through rationality as it does through emotional, Manichean, and self-affirming rhetoric (Espí, 2019; Guamán et al., 2019).

Finally, Antón-Mellón and Hernández-Carr (2016)—using the concept of "ethnocratic liberalism" proposed by Griffin (2000)—suggest that, to carry out their proposals, these formations have undergone a transformation that has forced them to embrace the project of liberalism in all its consequences: alternation in power of different political forces, renunciation of violence, acceptance of the rule of law... All of this from an explicitly conservative stance toward parliamentary democracy, through which to create an institutionalized and democratically validated system of discrimination (Antón-Mellón, 2007).

Complex Problems, Simple Answers

We can observe how, in the pursuit of a common enemy that serves as a catalyst for their ideological proposal, the "new far right" only engages in an exhaustive simplification of reality and its multiple contradictions. In a complex historical context that requires the effort of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, origin... the parties of the "new far right" center their discourse around national security, safety, and patriotism, pitting national identity against dialogue and the search for solutions that adapt to the complexity of an uncertain future. For instance, both the economic crisis and the international migration crisis in recent years have contributed to reinforcing the exclusionary discourse of the "new far right" throughout the old continent. Just in 2015, the number of asylum applications—due to the growing political, economic, and social instability affecting various countries in Africa and the Middle East—exponentially increased to receive 1.3 million, a number much higher compared to the average 300,000 received in previous years (Eurostat, 2018). As Montoya (2017) suggests, "exclusive ideologies have raised their voice more strongly, using the economic crisis and the refugee crisis as a pretext to approach power, using populist discourses based on fear and xenophobia, with the sole objective of obtaining the maximum possible votes" (p. 71).

Clearly, this increase in refugee influx to different European countries from 2015 onwards heightened the fear of some form of uncontrolled migration (Mayer, 2018), which is reflected in the ideological project of most of the parties discussed in this article. The same applies to religious matters, as these formations openly express their rejection of the Islamic religion, without any nuances. Thus, such explicitly exclusionary parties exploit the fear of the working classes to lose or worsen an already vulnerable status quo (Melzer, 2017). Based on all these elements, the "new far right" seeks to defend supposedly national interests by evoking "a mythical and pure past tragically destroyed. Depending on how the nation is defined, the purity of that mythical past will be religious, racial, cultural, or even combine all these characteristics" (Stanley, 2019, p. 13). This is why the

simplistic and exclusionary discourse of the "new far right" revolves around an ideological framework of nationalism, nativism-xenophobia, anti-immigration, and populism. A discourse that in Europe, within the context of the "end of progressive neoliberalism" (Fraser, 2017), "adopts the trappings of traditional conservatism: family, community, religion, and order" (Ramas, 2019, p. 79).

The Educational Field in the Face of the Rise of the "New Far Right"

In this context, what role does the educational field play in this complex discussion? It's crucial to understand that education is a social institution fundamental to unraveling the discourse of hate. As we aim to demonstrate, most of the European "new far right" formations—aware of the significance of this space for socialization and the construction of the social world—include measures in their electoral programs aimed at implementing within national education systems to spread their ideological line. This is even more relevant when, according to Schemer (2012), there's no doubt that lower levels of information can increase the risk of generating stereotypes towards ethnic minorities and immigrants. It is thus necessary to conceive of the educational field as an inherently political, cultural, social, and economic space linked to power and control. In line with Smyth (1991), "teaching is a political process that serves certain interests while actively excluding and rejecting others" (p. 293). Schools, like any other scene of socialization, are not detached from the landscape they are embedded in (Smyth, 2011). In this sense, multiple studies have unraveled the role of schools in the reproduction and imposition of the cultural arbitrariness of dominant classes (Ávila, 2005; Baudelot & Establet, 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2018).

In a context where the exclusionary projects of the "new far right" are on the rise, it might be possible to conceive of the educational field as a political and ideological terrain capable of presenting elements of discussion in democratic, critical, plural—never exclusionary—and culturally sensitive terms that acknowledge the difference within the common. Not long ago, Habermas (2016) suggested in an interview for a German media outlet that, instead of fluttering around the supporters and sympathizers of the "new far right" formations—those individuals who respond to their discourse—truly democratic individuals and parties should simply stop courting those "concerned citizens" and see them for what they are: the breeding ground for a new fascism. Nonetheless, let's acknowledge the significance of the problem at hand and strive to bring to light, from the educational field and before it's too late, the discourse of hate and exclusion that is sweeping through Europe today.

Methodology

The choice of methodology has been crucial for the development of this research. Due to the intrinsic nature of the investigation, the selected methodology is Documentary Analysis. Its increasing prestige since the beginning of the millennium, although not without critics (Botero, 2015), has led to its extensive use in qualitative research (Padilla-Carmona et al., 2010). To summarize, we can refer to the work of Hernández-Ayala and Tobón-Tobón (2016) to define documentary analysis as the task of "searching, selecting, organizing, and analyzing a set of written materials to answer one or more questions about a topic" (p. 401). The reasons for selecting this method are diverse. On one hand, it distinguishes itself by being able to conduct interpretations from the texts themselves (Jiménez et al., 2017). Furthermore, following Botero (2015), this methodology promotes, and indeed requires, a reflective, analytical, and critical investigation, allowing us to "construct knowledge from reading, analysis, reflection, and interpretation of documents" (González, 2017, p. 27). In our case, the electoral programs of different "new far right" organizations. Through these, we will present the worldview of these political parties, namely, how

and what arguments they use to disseminate their ideological perspective to future generations (Peña & Pirela, 2007).

Thus, our texts for analysis are the electoral programs of four European "new far right" parties: VOX (Spain), National Rally (France), AfD (Germany), and Northern League (Italy). The choice of these political parties provides a broad overview of the "new far right" European conception of education. In this regard, we analyze National Rally, a party with a long history in the French political scene, while VOX is an emerging party recently introduced to the center of the Spanish political debate. Furthermore, an interesting aspect is that both Northern League and VOX operate within Mediterranean contexts, making both states major entry points for migrant populations—mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East—into Europe. On the other hand, we consider it pertinent to give special consideration to National Rally and AfD, given the prominent role of France and Germany within the European Union. Overall, this research pursues two objectives: To identify convergences and divergences in the educational aspects of the electoral programs of various European "new far right" political parties; To discuss the challenges, risks, and opportunities for the future of education in the European Union based on the electoral results of "new far right" parties in the European Parliament.

To address these objectives, we have approached the four electoral programs using a complementary inductive and deductive practice (Botero, 2015). The texts enable us to understand the social representations of these political parties and establish categories of analysis from their texts. Furthermore, the analysis matrix has been grounded and developed through an exhaustive review of scientific literature, making it necessary and relevant to include categories of analysis such as nationalism, xenophobia, anti-immigration, and the LGBTQ+ community. Consequently, after a preliminary approach to the texts, some categories and indicators of analysis were identified, which were later discussed with the theoretical-academic sources underpinning this study. The resulting analysis matrix constructed from this process is presented in Table 1).

Table 1
Analysis Matrix

Category	Indicators
Organization and General Administration of the Educational System	Centralization; Scholarships and Study Aid; Quality and Evaluation Systems.
Curriculum Development	Contents and Nationalism; Teaching Staff.
Families	Family Choice; Family Ideal.
Vulnerable Sectors	LGBTQ+; Students with Special Educational Needs; Xenophobia and Anti-immigration (Immigrant Students and Religion).

Source: Own elaboration

Nevertheless, to systematize and provide objectivity to this research, it is appropriate to define the four categories and their corresponding indicators. Firstly, the organization and general administration of the education system includes—according to Zayas and Rodríguez (2010)—the

"ensemble of actors, establishments, norms, and activities that encompass regions or nations" regulating formal education at both macro and micro levels (p. 8). This encompasses how the responsibility for this task is distributed among different national and regional actors, where a higher level of centralization implies greater executive power in educational matters. In this sense, one of the issues that need regulation is how scholarships and study grants are allocated in their territory, with the criteria established for access being crucial. To conclude this category, although the debate on educational quality has been widely discussed in academic literature (Monarca, 2012), in this work, we will focus on the allusions that the analyzed political parties make to this notion and how standardized evaluation systems allow for monitoring their education systems.

Secondly, we can define curriculum development as the set of strategies carried out by the educational community to achieve curricular objectives established based on theoretical, empirical, and philosophical assumptions in education (Bravo, 2018). As we will see, one of the major educational objectives pursued by these parties is the development of national identity, for which the selection and teaching strategies of content would be a priority. In this mission, which is predominantly ideological and revolves around an instrumental view of schooling by these political parties, the need to understand the role assigned to teachers arises.

Regarding the family category, "defining it is not a simple task, especially considering that there is no univocal concept of family" (Benítez, 2017, p. 60). Without revealing the study's findings prematurely, a convergence around a specific family model has been identified among the "new far right" parties, one that is not understood as idyllic but as a heteropatriarchal composition or structure in which a child should grow. On the other hand, family participation is also addressed in these programs through school choice. This neoliberal political measure (Saura & Muñoz, 2016) allows minors to attend any school, provided they meet the criteria established by the corresponding Administration or the schools themselves—always subject to the regulations of each region. Setting aside the discussion around the deeper implications of incorporating these neoliberal political measures, this "freedom of choice" accentuates social inequalities for some sectors, such as migrant populations, due to structural reasons such as their lack of language proficiency, or for individuals with lower educational levels (Reath, 2013).

Lastly, for vulnerable sectors, we refer to any population that, due to structural conditions of inequality in power relationships, faces a higher risk of harassment, violence—symbolic, physical, or institutional—and discrimination. In this regard, we can recognize, among other groups, the LGBTQ+ community, migrant populations, women—as both individual and collective subjects— people with disabilities, unaccompanied minors, and socially marginalized groups at risk of exclusion. In line with the theoretical framework, the explicit anti-immigrant discourse of these parties is acknowledged, making it essential to analyze how they address the rights of migrant students, including, for example, their religious and cultural freedoms.

Discussion

Nationalism

Centralization of the Education System

The first aspect we have analyzed in this study is the degree of centralization of education proposed by these political parties. Two clearly differentiated models can be identified. On one hand, VOX and Northern League have a strongly centralized conception of the education system,

especially VOX (2019, p. 3), which claims that it is necessary to limit "as much as possible the legislative capacity of the autonomous communities," a demand driven by the high level of educational competences held by the Autonomous Communities in Spain since the late 1990s (Puelles, 1996). This political party also proposes that the teacher access system be a national matter to guarantee "effective equality of opportunities" (VOX, 2019, p. 15). Conversely, Alternative for Germany (AfD) and National Rally grant greater autonomy to secondary, vocational, and university education institutions. Thus, "cultural policy should remain […] in the competences of the federal states" (AfD, 2018, p. 49) or Länder, considering that these have a significant degree of autonomy in Germany. Changing this matter could potentially go against the historical nature of the nation.

In a way, these two models clash, as the Mediterranean parties advocate strong centralization, while the Central European "new far right" parties emphasize the need to provide greater autonomy to educational institutions and regional authorities, which also constitute a significant aspect of their national identity.

Content: National Identity vs. Interculturality

On the other hand, the selection of educational content is highly relevant, as it serves as a means to achieve specific objectives, one of which is crucial in constructing national identity: a specific model of citizen. All four parties converge in stating that the educational system should perpetuate and legitimize the hegemonic culture and reinforce the national identity of their citizens. National Rally (2017), for example, emphasizes the need to "defend the national identity, values, and traditions of French civilization" (paragraph 91). Possibly, the most conservative and firm position in this matter is held by AfD, as it advocates that the state and civil society confront interculturalism to "defend the dominant German culture in a secure and proud manner" (AfD, 2018, p. 48).

In this task, learning the official language of the state emerges as a fundamental tool for all parties except the Italian. On one hand, National Rally considers it essential to "defend the French language" (National Rally, 2017, paragraph 96), while VOX (2019) refers to the "supposition" that in Spain there are people who are denied the right to learn in Spanish, alluding to Autonomous Communities where co-official languages exist. Therefore, the Spanish "new far right" party presents itself as the only one capable of "guaranteeing the right to be educated in Spanish throughout the national territory," something that, from its point of view, can only be achieved through a more centralized education (VOX, 2019, p. 15). However, concerning the learning of the official language of the state, VOX and AfD differ regarding the presence of co-official and minority languages from their respective national territories in the educational system. While VOX aims to reduce their presence in the education system, turning them into optional subjects subject to the free choice of families, AfD conceives co-official languages as a hallmark of Germany's identity. In fact, AfD (2018, p. 48) demands "an action plan for the conservation and strengthening of the high German language as well as its regional dialects, which historically developed as long-term intangible cultural heritage of humanity." Another divergence is established by the Italian party, Northern League, being the only "new far right" party that mentions foreign language learning in its electoral program, suggesting that the Scuola Materna—covering ages 3 to 6—is the ideal time for children to be exposed to a new language, something not surprising considering that Italy is one of the countries where secondary education institutions offer a wide range of languages from across the European Union (Eurydice, 2017).

Moreover, history is, unsurprisingly, a classic content that has served and continues to serve the reinforcement of these sentiments. Therefore, VOX (2019, p. 3) desires that schools teach and

praise "the feats and achievements of our national heroes," for which it will be necessary to develop a "comprehensive plan for the knowledge, dissemination, and protection of national identity and Spain's contribution to civilization and universal history" (p. 3). Far from implying that Spain should adopt a critical stance, reflect upon, and problematize its role in the colonization of the native peoples of Latin America—as recently urged by the Mexican President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, to the Spanish monarchy—it encourages the entire Spanish population to take pride in the conquest and domination of those territories over several centuries (Wallerstein, 1988).

Similarly, AfD and National Rally concur on the necessity for both art and music to be deeply studied in schools. In a way, these countries—France and Germany—have historically been global references in both disciplines, making the choice of these subjects not coincidental. It undoubtedly responds to the desire to elevate French and German works, fostering a sense of recognition and pride in their respective national identities. National Rally states that it is necessary to "defend the national identity, values, and traditions of French civilization. Include in the Constitution the defense and promotion of our historical and cultural heritage" (National Rally, 2017, paragraph 91). On the other hand, AfD (2018, p. 48) explicitly commits to "dominant German culture."

National Assessment

Regarding assessment within each territorial framework, both AfD, Liga Norte, and VOX advocate for standardized assessments throughout the entire national territory. While it's true that in the case of the Italian and Spanish parties, this is not surprising, as both formations are known for their strong centralist and homogenizing character, AfD's approach is surprising because this decision could be contradictory to their stance regarding the Länder, as in other areas, such as culture, they vehemently defend their autonomy.

Role of Education

Families: Freedom of Choice and Family Model

One of the main arguments employed by these four political parties, especially VOX and National Rally, is that they will ensure the freedom of choice for families. The Spanish political party questions the current choice system, aiming to "restore true freedom to choose their children's education, starting with the choice of school" (VOX, 2019, p. 15). This freedom becomes ambiguous and reveals a stance in favor of private and subsidized schools, explicitly functionalist, conceiving the education of new generations as an investment. Moreover, it can be assumed—based on various studies—that the freedom of school choice will only accentuate school segregation, as families with higher socioeconomic and cultural levels will have greater resources and capacity to make that decision (Ball et al., 1996; Bellei et al., 2019; Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Maroy, 2008; Valenzuela et al., 2014).

On the other hand, AfD believes it is necessary for schools and public authorities to adopt effective measures to defend traditional family models because "the classic image of the family must not be destroyed" (AfD, 2018, p. 55). Similarly, VOX (2019, p. 17) proposes the "enactment of an organic law for the protection of the natural family, recognizing it as an institution predating the State." However, AfD is very critical of how German schools are addressing new family models. They accuse educational institutions of subjectively promoting homosexuality and transgender issues (AfD, 2018, p. 55), which, in their view, amounts to indoctrinating children. Thus, the discourse against sexual diversity and, consequently, diversity within families, becomes a central theme for the "new far right."

Role of Teachers

The teaching profession and the role of teachers are present in all four electoral programs. VOX and AfD both agree on increasing legal protection for civil servants, including teachers. In the case of the Spanish "new far right" party, private school teachers would also be covered if they were to form a government. Thus, VOX (2019, p. 8) aims to consider "attacks on professionals, both public and private sector teachers, as an attack on authority (thereby equating private sector teachers with those working in the public sector) to be a criminal offense." It is interesting to discern this teacher model associated with an authoritarian figure, somewhat akin to the logic of law enforcement. This shifts the ethical-political framework of education toward an authoritarian and disciplinarian governance, explicitly marked by the hierarchy between teachers and students. In the process of strengthening the teaching profession from an authoritarian and legalistic perspective, Northern League, AfD, and National Rally emphasize the need to "restore the authority and respect of the teacher" (National Rally, 2017, paragraph 103) among students and families alike. AfD, on the other hand, states that female teachers, especially, face disrespect from students and Muslim families. Once again, xenophobia and the criminalization of minorities are evident.

The Italian party, Northern League (2018, p. 48), asserts that "of particular importance in this period is the figure of the responsible teacher, who represents an important reference figure for the child." Given the importance of teaching, AfD, National Rally, and Northern League believe that improvements must be made to the working conditions of teachers. In this regard, National Rally proposes increasing teacher salaries and offering attractive working conditions beyond financial compensation, such as more sick leave days or rewarding the good performance of the best teachers, as suggested by Northern League.

Quality of Education

While the debate on educational quality has permeated all public, political, and educational spheres, VOX sets itself apart from this debate and does not make any reference to this issue. However, National Rally and AfD insist on the need to restore meritocracy in their education systems. For this reason, the French far-right party will eliminate "the school timetable reform" (National Rally, 2017, paragraph 104). Both National Rally and AfD agree in asserting that everyone should have an opportunity, but affirmative action, particularly benefiting immigrant populations, needs to be ended.

Furthermore, AfD advocates for emphasizing the values of work and discipline as fundamental pillars for improving educational quality, as "willingness to work and discipline are prerequisites for successful knowledge transmission" (AfD, 2018, p. 55). For the German political party, educational quality is a central pillar of its electoral program, and they want to protect the German education system at all costs, as it is the most crucial reason for Germany's position as one of the economically leading nations. As we can see, the connection between the discourse of the "new far right" and the neoliberal discourse of growth and competition is clearly revealed, highlighting the neoliberal traits of these party's discourse.

They also propose that "a reduction in academic and professional demands for the sake of alleged better integration should not exist" (AfD, 2018, p. 64), which alludes to the cutthroat competition and individualism mentioned at the beginning of the article. In this sense, we can observe how the French and German far-right parties both agree that the education system should select only the best and that the level of demand must be very high. For both parties, "quality is more important than quantity" (AfD, 2018, p. 54). However, not all responsibility should fall on

students; it is the State that must invest more and better in basic education, university, and research (AfD, 2018; Northern League, 2018).

Xenophobia and Anti-Immigration

Religion

A definite point of convergence is found in the four electoral programs: they all display a very negative attitude and view of Islam. In fact, it's the only religion mentioned in these electoral programs, aside from Catholicism. However, the parties differ on how to address this issue within the education system. On one hand, VOX (2019, p. 7) advocates for the "exclusion of Islam from public schools," while AfD (2018, p. 56) proposes "a subject on Islamic religion in the German language for all Muslim students." However, AfD's (2018, p. 56) stance advocates for the closure of "Quran schools due to the uncontrollable risk of radical and unconstitutional indoctrination," at least until Islam undergoes some reform. In this sense, all parties agree in pointing to Islam as a serious threat to their countries' national security.

This alleged radicalization of Muslim individuals, in general, is a constant argument employed by these far-right parties, for which they propose diverse yet complementary measures. Firstly, VOX (2019, p. 7) considers it necessary to "demand absolute collaboration from those responsible for Islam in Spain for the detection of radicals." In turn, AfD (2018, p. 50) wants to "prevent the creation of parallel Islamic societies, with Sharia judges, that isolate themselves more and more."

Lastly, National Rally and AfD legitimize their discourse against Islam based on the inequality and inferiority to which they claim this religion subjects women. For this reason, National Rally (2017) refers to one of the major debates in France in recent years: the use of veils and burqas in schools and public spaces. To combat this, in a clear return to disciplinarian models, they propose the introduction of a "school uniform" (paragraph 103) as both are "religious-political symbols of female Muslim obedience to men, contradictory to the integration and equality of women and girls, as well as their free personality development" (AfD, 2018, p. 51). For all these reasons, both parties align themselves as defenders of "women's rights" (National Rally, 2017, paragraph 4) against Islam.

Immigrant Students

Within the educational realm, immigrant students are among the primary actors that these four "new far-right" parties focus on. On one hand, Northern League and AfD denounce the alleged privilege that these minors enjoy in their respective education systems. For this reason, the Italian party advocates for this group to be obligated to undertake the same activities as their peers, including participation in the Catholic Church. Similarly, the Northern League also supports denying them public spaces for prayer, thus impeding the free exercise of their religion and infringing upon their freedom of worship. In this line, AfD (2018) directly opposes "special rights for Muslim students and demand that they participate in physical education classes and school trips without exception" (p. 56). The German party also points out that the Muslim population has lower educational and labor success, which, combined with having more children than "Germans," results in the country's impoverishment.

For its part, National Rally deems it necessary to eliminate "language and culture of origin" (2017, paragraph 101), depriving these minors of nurturing and developing their own cultural roots, thereby forcing them to conform to the hegemonic culture and adopt an assimilationist stance. This way, we can observe how all four parties place the responsibility for their own inclusion on migrant

students—and on the foreign collective as a whole, not solely the students. Undoubtedly, this is an explicitly xenophobic stance, which implies that the state must avoid promoting political initiatives that facilitate the "inclusion" of these types of collectives. In this sense, when referring to this xenophobic character, we're alluding to how the discourse of these organizations excludes certain groups of the population from citizen rights—such as freedom of worship—while also denying the legitimacy of other "non-native" identities—in line with the "nativeness" of these far-right parties.

Other Vulnerable Groups

The last category we've analyzed is the attention given to vulnerable sectors—distinct from the migrant population. This issue is directly related to how political parties position themselves regarding gender equality. For instance, while National Rally staunchly defends gender equality in all social, labor, and educational spheres, AfD (2018), from a positivist standpoint, strongly criticizes gender studies, deeming them as not meeting the requirements for serious research (p. 53). However, there's no contradiction between these two stances, as National Rally's interpretation of the gender issue is quite specific. Throughout, the focus is not so much on structural problems but rather on issues of meritocracy. Additionally, the analysis by the European "new far-right" parties regarding this issue never includes the migrant and racialized population; rather, it pertains to European women—predominantly white—with a favorable socio-economic position. This is, an individualized interpretation of gender inequality not so much as a structural problem endemic to the socio-economic system but rather as a perceived flaw in equal opportunities within the same system. Thus, VOX (2019), aware of the strong support National Rally received in the 2017 French general elections in rural areas, proposes "combating the inequalities of opportunity that separate citizens from rural and urban areas" (p. 16), including educational gaps.

In another regard, VOX and AfD emphasize the need to offer a "generous and demanding scholarship system for families with fewer resources" (VOX, 2019, p. 16). Moreover, large families will benefit from free textbooks and discounts for "access to cultural goods" (VOX, 2019, p. 17). However, both stances align with the desire to defend the traditional family ideal and increase birth rates in their countries. Furthermore, all these initiatives to aid and support low-income families are directed towards national families; nowhere do they suggest the need to support vulnerable migrant families, in line with the xenophobic discourse mentioned in the previous point.

Lastly, both VOX and National Rally briefly mention the need for proposals to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities. While the Spanish far-right party proposes a specific plan for the integration of individuals with Down syndrome, AfD extols the great pedagogical value of special education schools. However, in no case do they refer to a concrete plan through which to carry out these proposals. Similarly, another at-risk population is those who left the education system prematurely. For this group, National Rally proposes creating an extensive network of second-chance schools with a vocational and technological focus.

Conclusions

As we outlined at the beginning of the article, it is crucial to reflect on the new far-right forces sweeping across Europe. This is even more significant when, contrary to the 1990s scenario (Antón-Mellón & Hernández-Carr, 2016), nowadays these kinds of parties are not only not dismissed from forming a government where they lack sufficient parliamentary majority, but often other political parties have chosen to accept their support in order to govern—such as in Italy or many cities in Spain. This "contagion effect," where the "new far-right" parties have transformed

from isolated and irrelevant political entities to key players in governing various countries, has become a consolidated reality across the European continent.

Examining the presented electoral programs, we can observe the explicit polarization of the discourse concerning national identity versus the "otherness," reflected in the construction of the narrative "us/them." This discourse is fundamentally xenophobic and rejects difference, constructing its narrative around the "invention of a glorious past that allows the suppression of any inconvenient reality. […] But the idealized past is never the real one" (Stanley, 2019, p. 23). However, we don't need to resort to extremes; a glance at how the four chosen political parties view disciplines like history or art reveals a converging ideological strategy that glorifies and (re)constructs this mythical past, always qualitatively superior to other cultures and societies. In essence, all these parties agree on the necessity of understanding the educational field as a space for national socialization and assimilation, against interculturalism.

Furthermore, while there are differences in how the parties envision the organization of their respective education systems, a transversal characteristic is evident: a perception of the educational field as "free from indoctrination." In other words, a positivist-instrumental understanding of education that presents it as a "neutral" space. This is an inherently ideological view that portrays the highly ideological field of education as its opposite—an act of ideological exercise par excellence (Žižek, 2009). Whether explicitly or implicitly, this is how their educational programs are framed. This kind of stance tends to desynchronize the relationship between schools and the social order. We must acknowledge that educational spaces are permeated by numerous ideological and political elements that serve various interests, be they pluralism, democracy, critical thinking, or respect for minorities.

Moreover, these parties strongly emphasize improving the educational quality of their respective systems, an idea that is both suggestive and almost irresistible. Yet, the discourse for educational quality is widespread for a simple reason: who could oppose enhancing our education systems and the education of future generations? However, the answer is more complex than we might initially think. The cost of promoting an essentially meritocratic education based on a culture of effort and demand is a covert—or overt—way of excluding students facing social, economic, cultural, and educational difficulties. In other words, we find a convergence in the classit and xenophobic way in which these parties understand access to, and progress within, educational institutions.

We must not forget that both working-class families and immigrant students are the groups most affected by this educational model, for several reasons. Firstly, research (Etxeberría & Elosegui, 2010; Martínez-Usarralde et al., 2017) has demonstrated that these students face more educational challenges and are twice as likely to experience academic failure compared to locals. The main barrier they face is acquiring the host country's language, which limits their access to other subjects (Etxeberría & Elosegui, 2010; Martínez-Usarralde et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the European "new far-right" believes that integration and educational success are the responsibility of immigrants, not the State, which reinforces existing inequalities and shifts the blame for failure from the educational system to each individual student. Additionally, migrant students experience bullying at an alarming rate (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017; O'Toole & Todd, 2018). Far from improving, its probable that this situation, encouraged by the normalization of exclusionary speech that we have been analyzing, will get worse given the xenophobic and exclusionary story that these parties

fervently promote in each of their public and political interventions, which they intend to implement within each national government.

In this scenario, human rights and the right to education could systematically and structurally be undermined by national governments, whether these parties gain power or their discourse permeates other political structures. The problematic relevance of their narrative extends beyond access to power. Thus, migrant students, predominantly Muslim, might not be able to exercise their religious freedom in schools, denying their fundamental rights and freedoms, an infringement of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This is not by chance; it's a conscious desire to stigmatize this population and solidify a discourse of hate towards those that are different and a rejection of their way of life. Therefore, national security is repeatedly used as an excuse to legitimize proposals that violate human rights, including the right to education of these minors.

It seems evident that these political parties prioritize national interests over those of the European Union. On numerous occasions, these interests directly clash with the community values of peace, solidarity, human dignity, freedom, equality, justice, security, diversity, and political education (Matarranz, 2017). The "new far-right" in Europe, like the traditional far-right, undermines each of these fundamental values of the European project. Facing this scenario, in the same way that we cannot ignore the exclusionary nature of the European Union's border policies, which violate international legislation of human rights, it is at the same time incongruous to promote peace among nations when the principle of community solidarity is constantly reneged to the benefit of national interests. Where citizenship is only a privilege that the national population, uniquely and exclusively can enjoy, because *we* are subjects with more rights and *our* way of life is superior to *yours* (Van Dijk, 2005).

Where international treaties of human rights are not respected, occasionally even by different international organizations, nor promoted in their educational programs, and there is no mention of the development of an educational system based on human rights. Where the so-called "national security" is an exclusionary perspective, it would seem that the security of the thousands of persons dead in the Mediterranean and on the borders was not the responsibility of the different European countries or of the European migration policies. Where diversity is understood as a problem y there is an attempt to strengthen the traditional idea of family and the most retrograde classical values. Meaning, a context where education cannot be political if it does not promote the development of critical thinking and problem solving by the students. A characteristic, of course, forgotten and banished from all the electioneering programs of these formations.

In conclusion, both the European Union as a supranational organization, as those of us that are a part of it must think and self-critique to attempt to identify what has led to this situation. Member states, and the European Union as such, should step up and promote educational policies that not only counteract the discourses of the "new far-right," increasingly present in our society, but also develop narratives that champion diversity, coexistence, and democracy. In spite of the fact that in their educational policies this discourse is present across the board (eg. DO, C189/1, 2018; DO, C189/4, 2019), these tend to be mostly *soft policies* (Matarranz, 2017), which leaves in the hands of the individual states the implementation, or not, of these policies. In addition, said policies could be complemented with initiatives that allow the citizens to better know, respect, and value the immigrant population. An example of these is the webpage "Stop Rumors", of the Federación Andalucía Acoge (2021), whose objective is to fight rumors and prejudice that the local population might have about the immigrant people. And it's so that we must consider that the rise of these

formations, as we have been saying, "is only the reactive response, a symptom, not the cause. The cause is the socio-historical situation of the neoliberal desert, the atomized society, the destruction of the democratic institutions and the common certainties" (Ramas, 2019, p.87). All in all, neither is this the place to sort this out, nor is there a recipe to solve the complex problem that we have been discussing. Nevertheless, we are aware that the work of understanding the programmatic proposals of the European "new extreme right" must help us question and disassemble their narrative, not to amplify it or fear it, but to confront it and dispute the public presence of the formations from an ideological perspective. And, as it cannot be any other way, education plays a crucial tool in this process. A process that, with certainty, extends beyond Europe, including the United States, where the normalization of the foreseeable construction of the Trump-Mexico wall is becoming more palpable; Brazil, with far-right extremist Bolsonaro and his controversial xenophobic and homophobic initiatives; or Bolivia, where military interventions to take power are being legitimized. All these cases, our European ones or the American ones, must be understood from the education field as the tips of the spear in the confrontation with exclusionary and hateful speech. Education will never be out of this struggle: it will be either the incendiary weapon or the medicine.

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