

Launched the Same Week: Podemos, Vox and Facebook in Spain, 2014 to 2020

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Abstract

Podemos and Vox were both presented to the press in Madrid in the same week of January 2014. Podemos won 8% of the vote at the European election four months later and 21% with its regional allies at the general election of December 2015. Vox won 0.2% in 2015 and 2016, then 11% at the Andalusian regional election of December 2018 and 15% at the general election of November 2019. I ask how each party's share of Facebook engagement related to its support in the polls and at elections, and whether changes in that share came before changes in the polls. I use 58,418 posts from the official national Facebook pages of the main Spanish parties, recorded by CrowdTangle from January 2014 to October 2020, and compare each party's monthly share of interactions on these pages with its share in 1,155 national polls and at seven elections. Podemos drew about half of all interactions from its first weeks, before national polls included it, and 50% in the month before the 2014 European election. Vox's share rose from 4% in 2016 to 15% in the spring of 2018 and 33% to 39% from October to December 2018, while its share in the polls stayed below 3% until the Andalusian result. A typical Vox post drew less engagement than a typical post by the other parties until 2018 and nearly six times as much in 2019 and 2020. After their breakthroughs both parties drew roughly two to five times their share of the vote. Tests of timing are weak. For Vox, a rise in Facebook share over three months was followed by a rise in poll share, but the association comes from the campaign periods of 2018 and 2019 and is absent before the breakthrough. Several earlier jumps in Vox's share were not followed by poll gains. For Podemos, the association appears only at a one-month horizon. Facebook engagement in this period identified the two insurgents' unusual pull on attention, but was a poor guide to the level of their support and an unreliable guide to its timing.

Keywords: Vox; Podemos; Spain; Facebook; CrowdTangle; opinion polls; populism; new parties

1 Introduction

In the same week of January 2014 two new parties were presented to the press in Madrid. Podemos, a left-populist party led by the political scientist Pablo Iglesias, grew out of the anti-austerity protests that followed the financial crisis. Vox, a radical-right party founded the previous month by former members of the People's Party (PP), was presented on 16 January. The first posts on both parties' Facebook pages

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in my data were made on 16 and 17 January. Their electoral paths were very different. Podemos won 8% of the vote at the European election in May 2014, led some national polls by the end of that year, and won 21% with its regional allies at the general election of December 2015. Vox won 1.6% in May 2014 and 0.2% at the general elections of 2015 and 2016, then won 11% at the Andalusian regional election of December 2018, and 10% and 15% at the general elections of April and November 2019 ([Ministerio del Interior and Junta de Andalucía 2019](#)). Its breakthrough has been explained by, among other things, the conflict over Catalan independence ([Turnbull-Dugarte 2019](#)) and the wider nativist turn in European politics ([Rama et al. 2021](#)).

This paper asks how each party's share of Facebook engagement related to its support, and whether changes in that share came before changes in the polls. It follows a study of Sinn Féin before the 2020 Irish general election, in which the party's share of interactions on Irish politicians' pages rose sharply one to three months before most polls recorded its surge, but in which the same measure had produced false signals and was a poor guide to the level of the vote ([Hotham 2026a](#)). Spain offers two cases in one dataset: a new party of the left that broke through within months and a new party of the right that took almost five years.

Claims that social media predict elections are common and usually weak. Studies of Twitter found that counts of mentions or followers predicted results poorly and inconsistently ([Gayo-Avello 2012](#)), and digital trace data are better read as indicators of attention than of support ([Jungherr et al. 2017](#)). Social media have been argued to suit populist communication particularly well ([Gerbaudo 2018](#)), and Podemos built a large online following alongside its television presence ([Casero-Ripollés et al. 2016](#)). In earlier work I found that across 17 European countries a typical post by a populist party drew about 2.5 times the engagement of a post by another party of the same size, and that the premium was largest in Spain, where it rested on Podemos and Vox ([Hotham 2026b](#)). In Britain, Facebook engagement favoured Jeremy Corbyn and Nigel Farage far beyond their poll ratings ([Hotham 2026c](#)). So the level of engagement is not support. The question here is whether changes in it carry information about changes in support, and whether they come first.

I ask three questions. How did each party's share of engagement compare with its share in the polls and at elections? Did rises in that share come before rises in the polls? And how often did the share rise without the polls following?

2 Data and methods

2.1 Pages and posts

The data come from CrowdTangle ([CrowdTangle Team 2020](#)), exported in October 2020 during my doctoral research ([Hotham 2021](#)), from a CrowdTangle list of Spanish political party pages. I use the official national pages of the parties that won seats in the Congress of Deputies at the general elections of 2015, 2016 and 2019 as national parties: the PP, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Podemos, Izquierda Unida (IU), Ciudadanos (Cs) and Vox (Table 1). I exclude Más País, which first stood in November 2019; regional parties, which compete in only part of the country; parties that won no Congress seats in these elections, such as UPyD and PACMA; and party leaders' pages, because the export has no page for Vox's leader. The list also contained a page called "Unidas Podemos - Plataforma Ciudadana", which began posting in November 2015, before the alliance of that name existed, and whose content is that of a supporters' page. I exclude it.

Table 1. Party pages, January 2014 to October 2020.

Page	Posts	Interactions (m)	First post	Page likes, Oct 2020
Partido Popular (PP)	12,581	13.3	Jan 2014	232,462
PSOE	8,743	10.1	Jan 2014	204,517
Podemos	15,116	80.0	Jan 2014	1,330,825
Izquierda Unida (IU)	4,813	11.4	Jan 2014	346,851
Ciudadanos (Cs)	6,372	14.0	Jan 2014	328,380
Vox	10,793	32.1	Jan 2014	446,051
Total	58,418	161.0		

Page likes are those CrowdTangle recorded on each page's last post.

I treat Podemos and IU as one “Podemos family” from 9 May 2016, when they agreed the Unidos Podemos alliance, and count IU separately before that. This changes the composition of the family at that date, which I mark in the figures. In 2015 and 2016 the family's vote includes its regional allies (En Comú Podem, Compromís and En Marea), whose pages are not included.

After removing duplicate records there are 58,418 posts from January 2014 to 28 October 2020, with 161.0 million interactions, the sum of reactions, comments and shares. The year 2020 covers January to October only. The Podemos page alone drew 80 million interactions, half the total.

2.2 Polls and results

For the polls I use the national voting-intention polls compiled on Wikipedia for the general elections of 2015, 2016, April 2019, November 2019 and 2023 ([Wikipedia contributors 2026](#)), keeping the 1,155 polls with fieldwork ending between January 2014 and October 2020. I take each poll's estimate for each party, using the Unidas Podemos figure for the Podemos family once the alliance existed, and compute the median across polls in each month. The compilations include some re-estimates of the official CIS survey by other firms, which I count as separate polls.

Many polls did not report Vox before the end of 2018. Before July 2016 the compilations have no Vox column. In 2016 and 2017 at most two polls a month reported Vox, and in many months none; from January to November 2018 between one and nine a month did; from December 2018 almost all did. In 2016 and 2017 the Vox series is therefore often a single poll. Pollsters that reported Vox may differ from those that did not, in either direction. The Vox series before December 2018 should be read as indicating that Vox polled at 1% to 3%, not as a precise series. Months with no poll reporting Vox are left blank.

To compare like with like, I express each party's poll figure as a share of the total for the same set of parties (PP, PSOE, the Podemos family, IU before the alliance, Cs and Vox). I call this its *poll share*. The set won 84% to 90% of the vote at the general elections of this period, so a party's poll share is somewhat higher than its raw poll figure. I do the same with official results for seven elections ([Ministerio del Interior and Junta de Andalucía 2019](#)): the European elections of 2014 and 2019, the general elections of 2015, 2016, April 2019 and November 2019, and the Andalusian regional election of 2018, the first in which Vox won seats in a regional parliament. At the 2014 European election the set won only 72% of the vote, because UPyD and other parties then represented are excluded. The Andalusian result is regional and is compared with national pages, so it is a weaker comparison than the others.

2.3 Measures

The main measure is each party's *Facebook share*: its share of all interactions on these pages in a month. Unlike totals, the share does not depend on Facebook's overall growth, but it does depend on the other parties. The Podemos page drew half of all interactions, so when it drew less, every other party's share rose. I therefore also report Vox's share excluding the Podemos family.

To compare with elections I use the 30 days before each vote. To describe the typical post I use the median interactions per post, and per 1,000 page likes, which CrowdTangle records from mid-2015.

To ask whether changes in Facebook share came before changes in the polls, I regress the change in a party's poll share over the next h months on the change in its Facebook share over the previous h months, controlling for the change in its poll share over the previous h months, with Newey-West standard errors. My main specification uses $h = 3$, and I also report one- and two-month horizons, estimates on non-overlapping three-month windows, and estimates that exclude the campaign periods. For Vox I use months from July 2016 for which the poll values needed are available; for Podemos, months from May 2014. The windows overlap, the series are short and some are interrupted, so these are descriptive tests of timing.

Finally, I identify every month in which Vox's Facebook share was at least five points above its average over the previous three months, and record what followed in the polls. For each such month I report how concentrated Vox's engagement was: the share of its interactions from its five most engaged posts, and the number of posts with 5,000 or more interactions. A fixed five-point threshold is a doubling when Vox's share was 4% and ordinary variation when it was 40%, so the early jumps are the informative ones.

3 Findings

3.1 Podemos: dominant from the start

Podemos drew a large share of the engagement on Spanish party pages from its first weeks (Figure 1). In January and February 2014 its page drew 52% and 59% of all interactions on these pages. National polls did not include it until April, so this is a comparison with no measurement rather than with low support. In May 2014, the month of the European election, it drew 77%, and from June to December 84% to 86%. Its poll share was 2% in April and 4% in May, 20% in June and 32% in November and December. In the 30 days before the European election Podemos drew 50% of the engagement and went on to win 11% of the votes cast for these parties (Table 2).

The share stayed far above the party's support for the rest of the period. Podemos's poll share fell from 32% in late 2014 to between 18% and 27% in 2016 to 2018 and about 14% to 16% in 2019 and 2020. Its Facebook share averaged 63% from mid-2016 to 2018, and was 29% to 55% in 2019 and 2020. Before each general election it drew two to three times its share of the vote.

3.2 Vox: a slow rise, then a surge

Vox drew little engagement for its first three years. Its Facebook share averaged 1.8% in 2014 and 2015 and 3.7% in 2016 (Table 3), and the median Vox post drew 8% to 22% of the interactions of the median post by the other parties in 2015 and 2016. Its poll share, where measured, was below 0.5%.

The rise began in 2017 and accelerated in 2018 (Figure 2). Vox's share averaged 8.1% in 2017, with

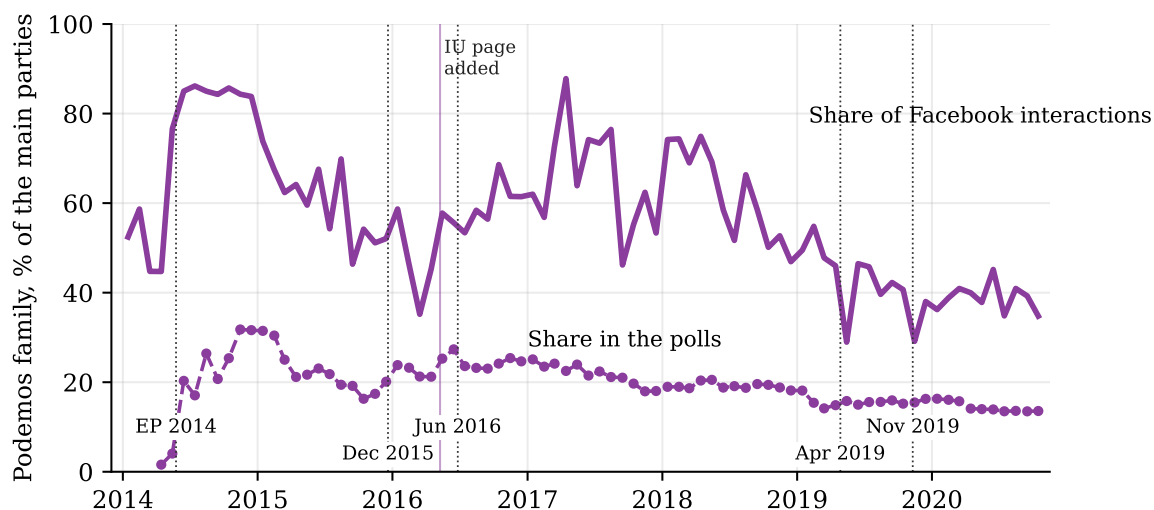


Figure 1. The Podemos family’s share of interactions on the main national party pages and its share in the polls, by month, January 2014 to October 2020. Poll share is the monthly median poll figure as a share of the total for the same parties. The IU page is added to the family from May 2016. Dotted lines mark the 2014 European election and the general elections.

two spikes, then about 15% from March to May 2018, 22% in June and 29% in July. In October and November 2018 it drew 33%, and in December 39%. Over the same months its poll share was between 0.2% and 2.9%. The Andalusian election on 2 December, in which Vox won 11% of the vote, moved the national polls: Vox’s poll share was 9% in December and 11% to 13% from January to April 2019. Excluding the Podemos family, Vox drew 48% of the remaining engagement in March 2018, 53% in June and 66% in October. From June 2018 it drew more than the PP, the PSOE and Ciudadanos combined in every month except September 2018 and April 2019.

The rise was not only a matter of Vox gaining a share of a shrinking total. The typical Vox post drew level with the typical post of the other parties in 2018, overtook it from the middle of that year, and drew nearly six times as much in 2019 and 2020 (Table 3; Figure 3). It was also not simply a larger audience. In mid-2018 Vox’s page had about 100,000 likes, fewer than the PP’s or the PSOE’s, and in 2018 its posts drew a median of 9 interactions per 1,000 page likes against 2.0 for the other parties’ posts. Smaller pages tend to draw more per follower, and Vox’s posts already drew more per follower than the others’ in 2015 and 2016, when it had little support, so this comparison flatters it. But the gap widened as its page grew: in 2019 the figures were 17.9 and 2.7, when Vox had about 250,000 page likes. By October 2020 it had 446,000.

After its breakthrough Vox’s Facebook share stayed well above its support. It drew 26% of the engagement in the month before the April 2019 election and won 12% of the vote for these parties, and 46% before the November election, when it won 18%. At the European election of May 2019, where its vote fell to 6%, its Facebook share was 41%. Like Podemos, Vox drew roughly two to five times its share of the vote once it was electorally established (2.1 to 5.4 times).

3.3 Did the shifts come first?

The level shift in Vox’s engagement came before its breakthrough: by October 2018 it was drawing a third of all engagement on these pages, and two-thirds excluding Podemos, while polling at about 2%.

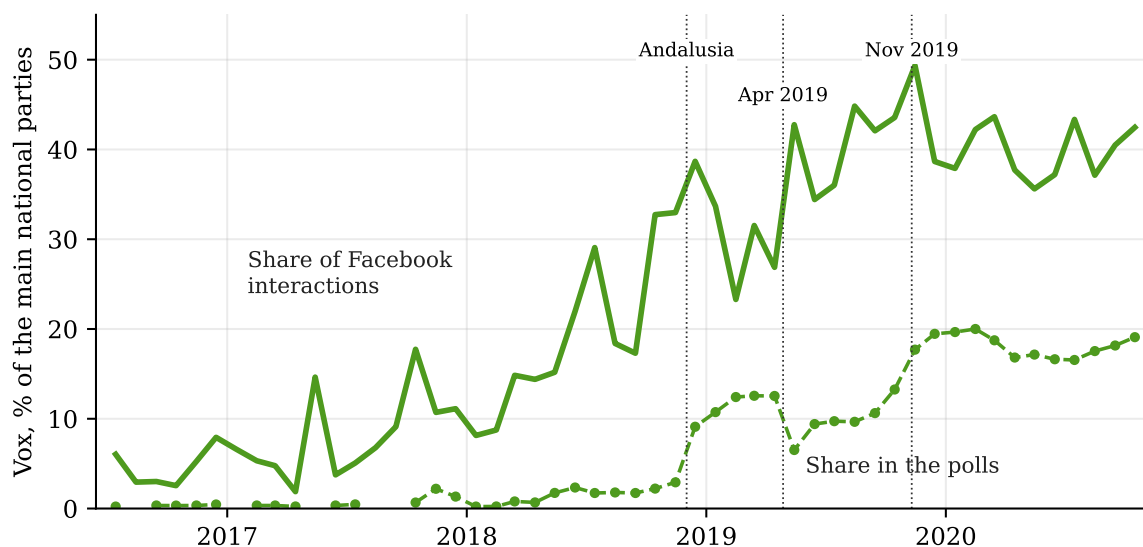


Figure 2. Vox’s share of interactions on the main national party pages and its share in the polls, by month, July 2016 to October 2020. Gaps in the poll series are months in which no poll reported Vox. Before December 2018 most points rest on one to nine polls, and May 2019 on two. Dotted lines mark the Andalusian regional election of December 2018 and the two general elections of 2019.

Whether month-to-month changes in Facebook share came before changes in the polls is a different question, and the answer is less clear (Table 4).

In the main specification, a ten-point rise in Vox’s Facebook share over three months was followed by a rise of about two points in its poll share over the next three months. A similar association appears at a two-month horizon and, more weakly, at one month. But it comes from the campaign periods. Before the breakthrough, from late 2016 to mid-2018, there is no association at all, although Vox’s Facebook share rose sharply over those months while its poll share barely moved. Excluding the months whose windows overlap the Andalusian campaign weakens the estimate, and excluding the windows around all three campaigns, Andalusia and the two general elections of 2019, removes it. Estimates on non-overlapping windows rest on 11 or 12 observations and vary with the starting month. Measured as Vox’s share excluding Podemos, the main estimate halves. In short, Vox’s Facebook share and its poll share moved together around elections in 2018 and 2019, with Facebook somewhat ahead, but there is no evidence that the measure anticipated movements in Vox’s support outside campaigns.

For Podemos, a one-month rise in its Facebook share was followed by a small rise in its poll share the next month, but there was no association at two- or three-month horizons, or from 2015 onwards.

Table 5 lists every month in which Vox’s Facebook share jumped by five points or more above its recent average. The jumps before October 2018 were followed by small poll gains or none. For May 2017 there are no polls to compare, and 79% of Vox’s engagement that month came from its five most engaged posts, two videos, one about Islam and one about the national anthem and Catalan separatism. In October 2017, during the crisis over the Catalan independence referendum, Vox’s share reached 18%. Its poll share was 0.7%, one poll put it at 2.2% in November, and three months later it was 0.2%. In March 2018 its poll share rose modestly over the next three months, from 0.8% to 2.3%, and in June 2018, the month of the motion of censure that removed the PP government, it did not rise. In July 2018, when its posts on the crossing of the border fence at Ceuta drew large audiences, its poll share moved from 1.7% to 2.2%.

The jumps of October and November 2018 were broader. The five most engaged posts accounted for

Table 2. Facebook share in the 30 days before each election and share of the vote, among the main national parties (%).

Election	Vox			Podemos family			PP and PSOE	
	Vote	Facebook	Ratio	Vote	Facebook	Ratio	Vote	Facebook
EP 2014	2.2	2.2	1.0	11.1	49.7	4.5	68.3	29.8
General 2015	0.3	2.6	–	23.2	49.6	2.1	56.8	19.8
General 2016	0.2	5.0	–	23.5	57.2	2.4	61.7	24.8
Andalusia 2018	11.7	33.7	2.9	17.2	52.0	3.0	51.7	9.3
General Apr 2019	11.9	25.5	2.1	16.7	48.2	2.9	52.9	18.8
EP 2019	7.6	41.1	5.4	12.4	31.3	2.5	65.1	23.3
General Nov 2019	18.0	46.4	2.6	15.4	38.0	2.5	58.4	12.7

Vote is each party's share of the votes cast for the PP, PSOE, the Podemos family, IU (where separate), Cs and Vox. The Podemos family's vote includes its regional allies in 2015 and 2016, whose pages are not included. The Andalusian figure for the Podemos family is Adelante Andalucía, and the Andalusian election is regional. Ratio not shown where the vote share is below 1%.

Table 3. Vox on Facebook and in the polls, by year.

Year	Facebook	Poll	Median	Vox median	Per 1,000 page likes	
	share (%)	share (%)	per post	÷ others'	Vox	Others
2014	1.8	–	178	0.21	–	–
2015	1.8	–	118	0.08	8.5	7.0
2016	3.7	0.3	269	0.22	8.9	4.5
2017	8.1	0.7	378	0.42	5.9	2.4
2018	21.0	2.1	971	1.01	9.0	2.0
2019	37.3	12.1	5,366	5.64	17.9	2.7
2020 ^a	39.8	18.0	10,297	5.90	24.7	4.5

Shares are averages of monthly shares. Poll share is shown only for months with at least one poll reporting Vox. "Others" are the posts of the PP, PSOE, Podemos family, IU and Cs, pooled. Page likes are recorded from mid-2015, and for only a third of Vox's posts in 2015. ^a January to October.

28% and 16% of Vox's engagement, and 25 and 26 posts drew 5,000 interactions or more, against 13 in October 2017. October 2018 was the month of Vox's large rally at the Vistalegre arena in Madrid, and the Andalusian campaign followed. Three months later Vox's poll share was 11% to 12%, but by then the change in the polls was a response to an actual election result. A similar pattern appeared in the summer of 2019: Vox's share jumped in August, with 50 posts above 5,000 interactions, and its poll share rose from 10% to 18% by the November election.

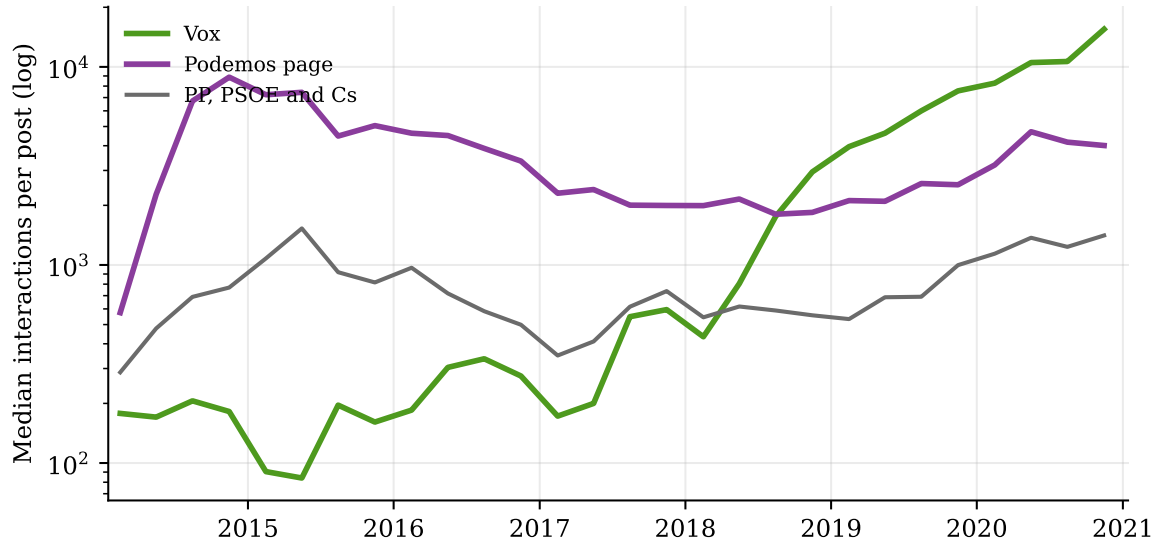


Figure 3. Median interactions per post on the Vox page, the Podemos page and the PP, PSOE and Cs pages combined, by quarter, 2014 to October 2020 (log scale). The last quarter covers 1 to 28 October 2020.

Table 4. Change in poll share over the next h months regressed on change in Facebook share over the previous h months.

	Coefficient	SE	p	n	First to last month
Vox, 3 months (main)	0.20	0.07	0.004	35	Dec 2016 to Jul 2020
Vox, 2 months	0.16	0.06	0.005	37	Sep 2016 to Aug 2020
Vox, 1 month	0.07	0.04	0.08	38	Oct 2016 to Sep 2020
Vox, before the breakthrough	0.00	0.02	0.91	9	Dec 2016 to May 2018
Vox, excluding Andalusian campaign	0.18	0.10	0.06	24	Dec 2016 to Jul 2020
Vox, excluding all three campaigns	0.04	0.05	0.34	15	Dec 2016 to Jul 2020
Vox, share excluding Podemos	0.11	0.05	0.03	35	Dec 2016 to Jul 2020
Vox, non-overlapping, start 1	0.08	0.12	0.53	12	Dec 2016 to Jun 2020
Vox, non-overlapping, start 2	0.23	0.14	0.08	12	Mar 2017 to Jul 2020
Vox, non-overlapping, start 3	0.32	0.13	0.01	11	Jul 2017 to May 2020
Podemos, 3 months	0.01	0.04	0.76	72	Aug 2014 to Jul 2020
Podemos, 2 months	0.03	0.03	0.40	74	Jul 2014 to Aug 2020
Podemos, 1 month	0.05	0.02	0.001	76	Jun 2014 to Sep 2020
Podemos, 3 months, from 2015	-0.02	0.03	0.53	64	Apr 2015 to Jul 2020

Each model controls for the change in poll share over the previous h months. Newey-West standard errors with h lags, except non-overlapping windows (robust standard errors). Campaign windows excluded are those for months from June 2018 to April 2019 (Andalusia), January to July 2019 (April) and August 2019 to January 2020 (November). Months are dropped where a poll value is missing, so consecutive observations are not always consecutive months.

Table 5. Months in which Vox’s Facebook share rose five points or more above its average over the previous three months.

Month	Facebook share (%)		Top 5 posts’ share (%)	Posts with 5,000+	Poll share (%)	
	Previous 3	Month			Month	3 months on
May 2017	4.0	14.6	79	2	–	–
Oct 2017	7.0	17.7	42	13	0.7	0.2
Mar 2018	9.3	14.8	15	6	0.8	2.3
Jun 2018	14.8	22.0	12	13	2.3	1.7
Jul 2018	17.2	29.1	30	18	1.7	2.2
Oct 2018	21.6	32.7	28	25	2.2	10.7
Nov 2018	22.8	33.0	16	26	2.9	12.4
Dec 2018	27.7	38.7	17	53	9.1	12.6
May 2019	27.2	42.8	21	42	6.5	9.7
Aug 2019	37.7	44.8	24	50	9.7	17.7
Nov 2019	43.5	49.3	20	85	17.7	20.0
Jul 2020	36.8	43.4	11	123	16.5	19.1

“Top 5 posts’ share” is the share of Vox’s interactions in the month from its five most engaged posts. Poll share is missing where no poll reported Vox.

4 Discussion

Both new parties drew far more Facebook engagement than their support, before and after their breakthroughs. Podemos drew about half of all engagement on Spanish party pages before national polls included it, and Vox's share rose through 2017 and 2018 while it polled at 1% to 3%, so that by October 2018, two months before the Andalusian election, it was drawing a third of all engagement and more than the PP, the PSOE and Ciudadanos combined. In both cases the level of engagement marked a party with an unusual capacity to attract attention before that showed in votes.

Three things qualify this. First, the measure overstates support. After their breakthroughs both parties drew roughly two to five times their share of the vote, and Podemos kept between a third and nearly nine-tenths of all engagement for six years while its support fell by half. This fits the view that digital traces measure attention rather than support ([Jungherr et al. 2017](#)), and the premium that populist parties draw on Facebook ([Hotham 2026b](#)).

Second, the timing evidence is weak. Vox's share rose for more than a year before its poll share moved, which is a long lead but also a long period in which the measure said nothing about when or whether support would follow. Its earlier jumps were followed by small poll gains or none, and month-to-month changes in its share were associated with later changes in the polls only around campaigns. The jumps that were followed by poll gains were broad, spread across dozens of posts, and lasted several months. That is similar to Sinn Féin, whose share of engagement rose on a few pages before it rose on many ([Hotham 2026a](#)). Breadth and persistence may help to separate a signal from noise, but in both countries the broad episodes coincided with campaigns, so with two cases this is a hypothesis.

Third, for Podemos the measure carried little information after its first year. Once its following was established, changes in its share reflected the news cycle and the other parties' activity more than its support. Whether a measure like this is informative may depend on whether a party is still assembling its electorate.

The episodes that drew Vox its largest audiences in 2017 and 2018 concerned Catalan separatism, national symbols, immigration and the change of government in June 2018. Accounts of Vox's electoral rise emphasise the Catalan question ([Turnbull-Dugarte 2019](#)) and, more broadly, nativism ([Rama et al. 2021](#)). The engagement data show which topics drew attention on Vox's page, not why people voted for it.

5 Limitations

The poll series for Vox before December 2018 rests on few polls, often one, and polls that reported a small party may differ from those that did not. The Facebook measure covers official national party pages only. Leaders' pages, regional pages and the many unofficial pages that supported each party are not included, and the export has no page for Vox's leader, Santiago Abascal. Shares depend on the set of pages: the Podemos page drew half of all interactions, and the Podemos family's composition changes in May 2016. CrowdTangle records interactions on public posts but not whether a post was promoted with paid advertising. Engagement includes reactions from opponents. The timing analysis uses overlapping windows over short, interrupted series and is descriptive. Two parties in one country are not a basis for a general rule.

6 Conclusion

Two new parties presented in Madrid in the same week in 2014 both drew a far larger share of Spanish party Facebook than of the vote, and both did so before they did well in the polls. For Vox, a large and sustained rise in its share of engagement came more than a year before its breakthrough. But the same measure overstated both parties' support several times over, produced false signals, and was linked to later movements in the polls only around election campaigns. Facebook engagement in this period was a guide to which parties were drawing attention, but not to how many votes they would win or when.

Provenance and AI use

The data were exported from CrowdTangle in October 2020 for my doctoral research. This paper builds on my doctoral thesis (Hotham 2021). The analysis and writing were completed in 2026.

The analysis code and drafts of the text were prepared with the assistance of an AI system (Claude, by Anthropic), which was also used to review drafts. I checked the analysis and the text and take responsibility for both.

Ethics and data

The data were collected through CrowdTangle during my doctoral research. They are public posts by political parties. In line with CrowdTangle's terms, I do not publish post-level data. Deposited with this paper are monthly interactions and shares by party, quarterly medians per post, the monthly poll medians used, the election comparisons, and monthly summaries of Vox's engagement concentration.

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