

## **FROM 'US' TO 'THEM': TOPICS, POLICY PROPOSALS, AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE JULY 23 ELECTORAL PROGRAMS**

### **DEL 'NOSOTROS' AL 'ELLOS': TEMAS, PROPUESTAS E IDENTIDADES EN LOS PROGRAMAS ELECTORALES DEL 23J**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

##### **Keywords:**

Electoral program, political communication, elections, electoral campaign, Spain.

Electoral manifestos are multifaceted instruments that reflect both the image and identity of political parties. They function as coherent programmatic agents and adapt their strategies to the electoral level and national dynamics. This genre is essential for understanding the complexity of party behavior and its impact on the electoral process, although it has been understudied from the perspective of political communication. This article aims to analyze the electoral manifestos of the four most representative parties—Sumar, Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), Partido Popular (PP), and Vox—that contested the 2023 Spanish general elections, using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach combined with content analysis. The findings reveal that all parties converged on key issues such as the economy and energy transition, with markedly different approaches. The most significant divergences were observed in the social and territorial domains, where Vox adopted conservative and centralist positions in contrast to the progressive and decentralizing proposals of PSOE and Sumar, while the PP maintained a more moderate stance. The study evidences an electoral discourse marked by polarization, constructing a 'we' in opposition to a 'them,' with each party defining its political identity in contrast to the others. This mechanism of ideological polarization, used to mobilize voters, reflects the growing fragmentation of the political landscape in Spain.

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#### **RESUMEN**

##### **Palabras clave:**

Los programas electorales son instrumentos multifacéticos que reflejan tanto la imagen como la identidad de los partidos, actúan como agentes programáticos coherentes y adaptan sus estrategias en función del nivel electoral y las dinámicas nacionales. Este género es fundamental para

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programa electoral, comunicación política, elecciones, campaña electoral, España.

comprender la complejidad del comportamiento partidario y su impacto en el proceso electoral, aunque ha sido poco estudiado desde la comunicación política. Este artículo propone llevar a cabo una aproximación al estudio de los programas electorales de los cuatro partidos más representativos – Sumar, Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), Partido Popular (PP) y Vox– que concurren a las elecciones generales españolas de 2023 a través del enfoque del Análisis Crítico del Discurso y el análisis de contenido. Los resultados desvelan que todos los partidos coincidieron en temas clave como economía y transición energética, aunque con enfoques muy distintos. Las mayores divergencias se reflejaron en los ámbitos social y territorial, donde VOX adoptó posturas conservadoras y centralistas frente a las propuestas progresistas y descentralizadoras del PSOE y Sumar, mientras que el PP ocupó una posición intermedia. Se evidencia un discurso electoral de polarización que construye un "nosotros" en contraposición a un "ellos", con cada partido definiendo su identidad política en oposición al otro. Este mecanismo de polarización ideológica, utilizado para movilizar a los electores, refleja la creciente fragmentación del panorama político en el país.

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## **Introduction**

Electoral campaigns are key moments in the political life of contemporary democracies, in which parties articulate their proposals and make known their visions of the country and deploy their communication strategies with the aim of mobilizing the electorate (Beaudoux and D'Adamo, 2004). In this context, electoral programs represent a fundamental tool for understanding the discursive priorities of political formations, as well as the ideological frameworks from which the political offer is constructed (Álvarez, 2015). Beyond their informative function, these documents constitute discursive artifacts that reflect programmatic intentions, social representations, symbolic disputes and positioning in the face of the country's main challenges (Alonso et al., 2007; Díez Gutiérrez and Gajardo Espinoza, 2020).

This article proposes to analyze the electoral programs of the main Spanish political parties that participated in the general elections<sup>1</sup> of July 23, 2023 (23J), using a qualitative methodology based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and content analysis.

This research is therefore framed within the field of political communication, with special attention to the discursive and symbolic mechanisms through which parties try to influence the public agenda and build a persuasive narrative for the electorate. Likewise, the analysis allows us to reflect on the changes in political discourse in a context marked by polarization, parliamentary fragmentation and the growing mediatization of politics, factors that condition both the content and the form of the programmatic message (Nieto-Jiménez, 2022).

The relevance of studying electoral programs is reinforced by the need to understand how parties differentiate themselves and formulate their priorities and values at a time of profound transformation of the Spanish political system, characterized by multiparty competition, the tension between centralism and plurinationality, and growing citizen concern about issues such as inequality, sustainability or digitalization. Although these documents are often considered to be limited in scope in terms of electoral impact, their analysis offers a privileged window to examine the internal coherence of partisan discourses and their legitimization strategies.

As previously mentioned, this study analyzes the electoral programs of four state-level political parties that obtained the greatest parliamentary representation in the 2023 elections: Sumar, Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), Partido Popular (PP) and Vox. This selection allows us to observe a broad ideological spectrum, as well as to contrast the different discursive approaches adopted by government, opposition and emerging parties.

## **State of the Art**

The electoral programs published by parties prior to elections are of fundamental importance in the democratic process for several key reasons (Ramírez Franco, 2018). First, these documents provide a clear roadmap of the policies and objectives that the parties intend to implement if elected (Duque Giraldo and Salazar Martínez, 2021). In this

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<sup>1</sup> The general elections in Spain are the elections to elect the members of the Congress of Deputies and the Senate, which make up the Cortes Generales, the country's main legislative body. They are held every four years. Voters elect deputies by a proportional system with representation by constituency, and senators by a mixed system (majority and proportional representation). The party or coalition with a majority in Congress proposes the president of the government.

way, electoral programs act as a social contract between the parties and the electorate, establishing specific expectations and commitments (Corzo Fernández, 2002).

Second, electoral programs facilitate greater transparency and accountability in the political arena (Labeaga and Ramiro, 2013). By detailing their proposals and plans, parties allow voters to evaluate their intentions and compare the different options available (Ramírez Franco, 2018). This not only enriches the public debate, but also helps citizens make informed decisions based on a detailed understanding of what each party stands for and how they plan to address current problems (Fernández de Mantilla, 2008).

In addition, electoral programs play a crucial role in legitimizing the electoral process. By presenting a structured set of proposals, parties demonstrate their preparedness and ability to govern, which contributes to the credibility of the democratic system (Sicilia and de la Torre, 2019). Voters can trust that elections are an opportunity to choose between well-defined visions of the country, which reinforces trust in the electoral process and in democratic institutions (Álvarez García, 2013).

According to Llamas Saiz (2018), electoral programs play a dual role by projecting both the image and identity of a party. The distinction between these two concepts is crucial for the construction and testing of theories on party behavior. "Image" refers to how a party emphasizes certain issues to appeal to specific voters, while "identity" relates to the party's fundamental positions on a variety of issues (Braun and Schmitt, 2018). This approach allows parties to address two audiences simultaneously with a single document, using strategies to satisfy both groups.

For their part, political parties can be seen as programmatic agents that, despite legal or institutional limitations, demonstrate coherence in their behavior (Ruiz Rodríguez, 2006). A study of Brazilian parties shows that, despite constant electoral legislation, parties have proven to be coherent collective actors in different democratic periods. This finding suggests that, in addition to institutional analysis, it is necessary to consider other variables to develop a general theory of partisan behavior (Lyne, 2005).

From an academic perspective, electoral programs are also valuable for political analysis and research (Castromil et al., 2020). These documents provide a rich source of data for studying ideological trends, political priorities and campaign strategies of the parties. Researchers can analyze how political platforms evolve over time, how they respond to changes in the social and economic environment, and how they align with citizens' demands and expectations (Moreno Díaz, 2022).

In sum, electoral programs are essential not only for transparency and accountability in the democratic process, but also for the legitimization of elections and academic analysis (Díez et al., 2021). By providing detailed insight into the political intentions of the parties, these documents allow voters to make informed decisions and researchers to better understand contemporary political dynamics (Alvarez Sanchez, 2015).

In the Spanish context, there has been a tendency on the part of national parties to transfer regional elections to the national arena, articulating their campaigns around state issues as part of their electoral strategy. This phenomenon has been studied through content analysis of the regional-level programs of the two main national parties, PP and PSOE, demonstrating that parties tend to nationalize regional elections under certain political conditions (Parker et al., 2017; Márquez, 2018). This nationalization strategy subordinates the regional arena to the national one, highlighting the influence of national dynamics on subnational elections.

In the 2023 general elections in Spain, electoral programs played a crucial role in several aspects of the electoral process. These documents served as key instruments for communicating the proposals and visions of the different political parties to the public.

Each party used its electoral program to present its policies and objectives in a structured manner, allowing voters to evaluate and compare the available options in an informed manner.

These electoral programs helped set the stage for the political debate during the campaign. The proposals contained in these documents were used by the candidates and the media to generate discussions and analysis on the most relevant issues for the country. This included discussions on the economy, education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and gender equality, among others. By focusing on electoral promises, the programs allowed for a more substantive discussion of the ideological differences and policy priorities of each party.

## **Method**

The objectives of the article are to identify the predominant thematic axes, to compare the proposals and identities of each group, and to analyze the discourse they construct around the measures they present. For this purpose, a qualitative methodology that combines political CDA with content analysis is used, allowing a comprehensive approach to the structure and discursive strategies used in the electoral programs of the political parties analyzed.

The CDA is based on Van Dijk's theory (2004), applied to electoral programs, which is an area of study that combines various techniques and approaches to unravel the communicative and persuasive strategies of political parties (Kress, 1990). Specifically, the model proposed by Siegfried Jäger, presented in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer's *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (2003), will be used. This method is particularly effective in identifying discourse functions, such as manipulation and selectivity, related to political goals (Ortega et al., 2021; Cabeza et al., 2017).

In particular, use is made of the categories of macrostructure, theme and text-context relationship, which make it possible to identify the global themes or main topics of each electoral program, determining the priority issues and their hierarchical organization in the text, as well as to analyze the linkage of the discourse with the current socio-political context. This approach includes the examination of references to recent events, national problems and social demands, and makes it possible to evaluate how the legitimacy of proposals is constructed according to this context (Van Dijk, 1999).

In this framework, it is particularly relevant to consider the theoretical contributions that explain how political discourses configure collective identities based on the logic of confrontation, particularly through the symbolic construction of 'us' versus 'them'. This discursive strategy, common in contemporary political communication, allows parties to present themselves as legitimate representatives of the general interest and contribute to delimit a political adversary to which negative or threatening characteristics are attributed (Van Dijk, 2001; Van Dijk, 2003; Mudde, 2004). It also incorporates Fairclough's (1995) approach, which emphasizes the ideological dimension of language in politics.

Content analysis makes it possible to systematically identify and quantify the key themes and concepts present in electoral programs, thus providing a solid empirical basis for comparing discursive priorities among the different political formations. This study adopts the methodological perspective proposed by Krippendorff (2004) and Neuendorf (2017), who conceive content analysis as a rigorous technique aimed at valid and replicable inference from textual data. Specifically, a thematic codification is established covering categories such as social justice, economics, immigration or civil rights, among others. This classification makes it possible to observe not only the frequency of

occurrence of certain themes (*issue frames*), but also their articulation with the discursive strategies previously identified through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), favoring an integrated reading of the contents and underlying ideological frames.

The analysis sample is composed of the four electoral programs published by the main Spanish national political organizations -Sumar, PSOE, Partido Popular and Vox- during the 2023 general elections in Spain. The sample has focused only on the programs of the main parties with parliamentary representation, excluding minority formations that could offer valuable alternative approaches. As of May 9, 2025, the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress is composed of 137 members, the Socialist Parliamentary Group of 120, the VOX Parliamentary Group of 33, the Plurinational Parliamentary Group SUMAR of 27. Below these are the Republican Parliamentary Group with 7 members, the Junts per Catalunya Parliamentary Group with 7, the Euskal Herria Bildu Parliamentary Group with 6, the Basque Parliamentary Group (EAJ-PNV) with 5 and the Mixed Parliamentary Group with 8 members.

## Results

Within the framework of the 23J, electoral programs played a significant role in mobilizing the electorate, offering a clear vision of what each party planned to do in the event of winning the elections. These documents sought to motivate voters to participate in the electoral process and allowed the parties to mobilize their bases, reinforcing their ideological identification and persuading undecided voters through concrete proposals in key areas and a multichannel dissemination strategy that facilitated the comparison between political options. Demoscopic studies have shown that a relevant part of the electorate made their final decision after comparing these proposals, which evidences the impact of the programmatic contents in the definition of the vote.

### **Add**

The electoral program of the Sumar coalition<sup>2</sup> for the 2023 general elections in Spain consists of 182 pages and presents five main blocks: 1) An economic and eco-social democracy at the service of the people; 2) A just, healthy and green welfare society; 3) A project to broaden democracy; 4) An international program. Spain, a power of peace and progress; and 5) A project of education, university, knowledge, science, culture, sports, innovation and digitalization for social cohesion and fair and sustainable transition. Within these blocks there is an extensive list of subsections such as "Economy for a better life", "Sustainable consumption with rights", "Agriculture and the rural world", "Fisheries, sustainability and the fishing sector", "Healthy food", "Livable cities and towns", "Right to housing" and "Sustainable mobility". In turn, within some of these subsections there are more sub-areas.

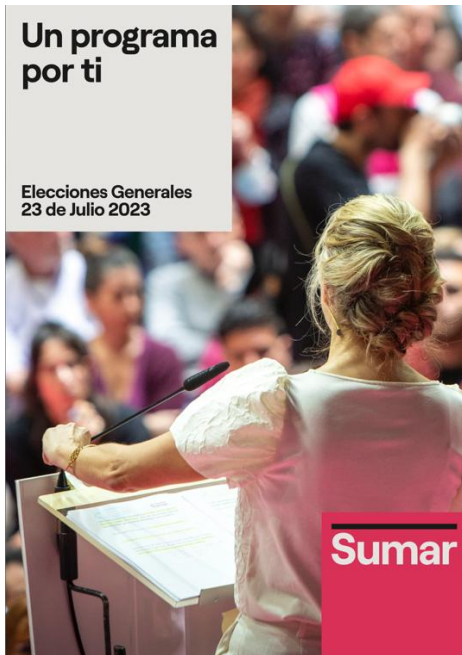
Sumar, a coalition of progressive parties and movements, presents a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to address the country's contemporary challenges. In the economic sphere, Sumar proposes a series of measures aimed at reducing inequality and promoting inclusive and sustainable growth. These include the implementation of a progressive tax reform that increases taxes on large fortunes and the most profitable companies, while easing tax burdens on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and workers. They also advocate a significant increase in the minimum wage and the promotion of policies that guarantee job stability and reduce job insecurity.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://movimientosumar.es/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Un-Programa-para-ti.pdf>

## Figure 1

### *Sumar's electoral program*



*Note. <https://movimientosumar.es/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Un-Programa-para-ti.pdf>*

The ecological transition is one of the central pillars of Sumar's program. The coalition puts forward an ambitious climate action plan that includes decarbonizing the economy to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. This would be achieved through the promotion of renewable energies, the improvement of energy efficiency in all sectors and the implementation of circular economy policies. On the other hand, Sumar is committed to promoting a change in the mobility model, favoring public and sustainable transport, as well as the electrification of the vehicle fleet.

In the area of public services, Sumar proposes a strong investment in the improvement and expansion of public education and healthcare. In education, its program includes free pre-school education from 0 to 3 years of age, the reduction of student-teacher ratios, and the universalization of access to higher education through scholarships and grants. Regarding healthcare, Sumar advocates the reinforcement of the national healthcare system, with an increase in funding, the hiring of more healthcare personnel and the improvement of hospital and primary care infrastructures. Specific measures are also proposed to address mental health and prevent chronic diseases.

Social justice and equality are also fundamental components of Sumar's program. The coalition proposes a series of policies to combat poverty and social exclusion, including the implementation of a universal basic income and the strengthening of social services. In the area of gender equality, Sumar is committed to closing the wage gap, promoting co-responsibility in caregiving and combating gender-based violence through greater protection and resources for victims.

Sumar also includes in its program a series of proposals to deepen democracy and encourage citizen participation. These include the reform of the electoral system to make it more proportional and representative, the promotion of direct participation mechanisms such as referendums and popular consultations, and the promotion of greater transparency and accountability in public institutions.

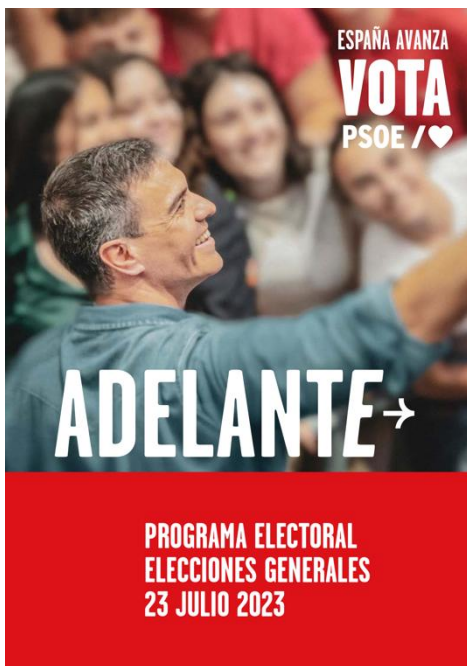
In summary, Sumar's electoral program for the 2023 general elections in Spain is articulated around social justice, ecological transition, improvement of public services and the deepening of participatory democracy. With a multidimensional approach, the coalition seeks to address the country's contemporary challenges through inclusive, sustainable and equitable policies.

## **PSOE**

The electoral program of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)<sup>3</sup> for the 2023 general elections in Spain focuses on several key pillars, including the economy, social justice, sustainability, education and health, with a special focus on gender equality and social rights. It is composed of 264 pages, in which seven major blocks are developed: "An economic policy at the service of citizenship and fair and sustainable economic growth"; "A green agenda to guarantee the welfare of today and tomorrow"; "A social elevator that guarantees welfare and equal opportunities for young people"; "The best Spain, the feminist Spain"; "The Spain of cohesion and welfare"; "The Spain of freedoms and coexistence"; and finally, "The European Spain open to the world".

### **Figure 2**

*PSOE electoral program*



*Note.* [https://www.psoe.es/media-content/2023/07/PROGRAMA\\_ELECTORAL-GENERALES-2023.pdf](https://www.psoe.es/media-content/2023/07/PROGRAMA_ELECTORAL-GENERALES-2023.pdf)

In the economic sphere, the PSOE proposes a series of measures aimed at recovery and sustainable growth. They propose the implementation of progressive tax policies to ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth, as well as incentives for innovation and digitalization of companies. They also commit to increase public investment in infrastructure and strategic sectors to promote employment and competitiveness.

Social justice and equality are central pillars of the socialist program. The PSOE is committed to implementing policies that reduce inequality and ensure greater social cohesion. This includes strengthening the social welfare system, with special emphasis on pensions, minimum wage and unemployment benefits. They also propose measures to

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.psoe.es/media-content/2023/07/PROGRAMA\\_ELECTORAL-GENERALES-2023.pdf](https://www.psoe.es/media-content/2023/07/PROGRAMA_ELECTORAL-GENERALES-2023.pdf)



improve working conditions, promoting employment stability and the fight against job insecurity.

In terms of sustainability, the PSOE presents an ambitious plan for the ecological transition. This plan includes the promotion of renewable energies, the improvement of energy efficiency and the implementation of circular economy policies. They are also committed to meeting the emission reduction targets set out in the Paris Agreement and to developing initiatives that promote sustainable mobility and biodiversity protection.

Education is another priority of the PSOE's program. They propose an educational reform that guarantees quality, inclusive and equitable public education. Among the measures highlighted are increased investment in education, modernization of school infrastructure and improved teacher training and working conditions. Likewise, policies are proposed to reduce school dropout rates and ensure access to higher education for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

In the area of health, the PSOE is committed to strengthening the public health system, ensuring its financing and improving the quality of services. They propose increasing the number of healthcare professionals, reducing waiting lists and guaranteeing access to innovative treatments. They also focus on mental health and the implementation of prevention and health promotion policies.

Gender equality is a cross-cutting component of the PSOE program. The party is committed to continue advancing in the fight against gender violence and to implement measures that promote real equality between men and women in all areas, including labor, education and politics. They propose specific policies to close the wage gap and promote co-responsibility in the domestic and family spheres.

In the area of social rights, the PSOE includes proposals to guarantee access to decent housing, improve social services and promote the inclusion of vulnerable groups. They are also committed to defending LGTBI rights and implementing integration and diversity policies.

In summary, the PSOE's electoral program for the 2023 general elections in Spain is articulated around social justice, sustainability, gender equality, improved education and public health, with a strong commitment to social cohesion and equity. The party aims to build a more just, inclusive and sustainable society, with policies that favor the well-being of all citizens.

## **PP**

The electoral program of the Partido Popular (PP)<sup>4</sup> for the 2023 general elections in Spain consists of 110 pages and focuses on a number of key areas, with 365 measures aimed at economic improvement, social stability, educational reform, environmental sustainability, and foreign policy. Specifically, its proposals are presented in five major blocks: "Grow sustainably"; "Care and thrive"; "Regenerate and respect"; "Serve"; and "Lead and influence".

### **Figure 3**

*PP electoral program*

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.pp.es/sites/default/files/documentos/programa\\_electoral\\_pp\\_23j\\_feijoo\\_2023.pdf](https://www.pp.es/sites/default/files/documentos/programa_electoral_pp_23j_feijoo_2023.pdf)



*Note. [https://www.pp.es/sites/default/files/documentos/programa\\_electoral\\_pp\\_23j\\_feijoo\\_2023.pdf](https://www.pp.es/sites/default/files/documentos/programa_electoral_pp_23j_feijoo_2023.pdf)*

In the economic sphere, the PP proposes a series of measures to promote growth and job creation. These measures include tax reductions, with the aim of increasing the competitiveness of companies and the purchasing power of citizens. They also propose administrative simplification to facilitate business activity and attract foreign investment.

In the labor field, the Partido Popular is committed to implementing policies that favor the creation of stable and quality employment. This includes incentives for permanent hiring and specific programs for young people and the long-term unemployed. In addition, they propose a reform of the vocational training system to align it more closely with the needs of the labor market, thus improving the employability of workers.

Education is another fundamental pillar of the PP's electoral program. The party advocates quality education based on excellence and equal opportunities. They propose a revision of educational curricula to ensure a comprehensive education adapted to the challenges of the 21st century, as well as greater support for subsidized education and freedom of choice for parents. In addition, they propose measures to reduce school dropout rates and improve students' academic results.

With regard to environmental sustainability, the Partido Popular includes in its program a series of proposals to promote sustainable development and environmental protection. These measures range from the promotion of renewable energies to the implementation of circular economy policies and the improvement of energy efficiency in all sectors. Also, the PP is committed to meeting the greenhouse gas emission reduction targets established at the European and international levels.

In the area of foreign policy, the Partido Popular defends Spain's active position on the international scene, based on the defense of national interests and the promotion of international cooperation. They propose to strengthen relations with the countries of the European Union and Latin America, as well as to maintain a firm security and defense policy.

Finally, in the social area, the PP's electoral program includes measures to improve the welfare of citizens, with special attention to the most vulnerable groups. This includes proposals to improve the public health system, increase pensions and strengthen social services. In turn, the PP is committed to implementing policies to support the family and

the birth rate, as well as measures to guarantee equal opportunities and to fight discrimination.

In summary, the electoral program of the Partido Popular for the 2023 General Elections in Spain is articulated around economic improvement, job creation, educational reform, environmental sustainability, an active foreign policy and social welfare, with the aim of building a more prosperous, fair and sustainable country.

## **VOX**

Vox's electoral program<sup>5</sup> for the 2023 general elections in Spain consists of 178 pages, presenting a series of proposals focused on several key areas. The document is divided into twenty sections: "Equality among Spaniards"; "Unity of Spain"; "Employment and decent wages"; "Education in freedom"; "Access to housing"; "Produced in Spain"; "Health"; "Social protection of Spaniards"; "Taxation for prosperity"; "Security and Defense"; "Immigration and National Identity"; "Green Spain"; "Reindustrialization and Energy Sovereignty"; "Depoliticization of Justice"; "European Union"; "Iberosphere"; "Rural Spain"; "Freedom of Expression"; "Family Perspective"; and "Human Dignity".

### **Figure 4**

*Vox electoral program*



*Note.* <https://www.voxespana.es/programa/programa-electoral-vox>

With regard to immigration and security, the party advocates strict control of borders by increasing resources and personnel for their protection. Furthermore, they propose the immediate deportation of illegal immigrants and those who commit crimes, as well as the suspension of any type of economic or social assistance to those who are in an irregular situation.

In the economic and labor field, Vox promotes a general reduction of taxes, with special emphasis on Personal Income Tax (IRPF) and corporate tax. They also propose specific measures to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the self-employed, with the aim of facilitating the creation and maintenance of these businesses.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.voxespana.es/programa/programa-electoral-vox>

Also included in its program is the promotion of the birth rate through family support policies, such as economic and fiscal aid to large families.

In the field of education and culture, Vox defends the freedom of choice of educational center and the right of parents to decide on the education of their children. They propose the elimination of educational contents that they consider ideological, especially those related to gender ideology. Likewise, they insist on a greater presence of Spanish history and culture in the school curriculum, in order to promote knowledge and pride in the national identity.

Regarding territorial policy and the unity of Spain, Vox advocates the suppression of the autonomous communities and the centralization of competencies in the national government. His program includes measures to strengthen national unity and combat separatist movements, thus defending the territorial integrity of the country.

In terms of justice and transparency, the party proposes a reform of the judicial system to guarantee its independence and improve its efficiency. They also propose a set of measures aimed at increasing transparency and combating corruption in all spheres of power.

In foreign policy, Vox promotes the defense of national sovereignty, advocating a foreign policy focused on the interests of Spain and reducing the influence of international organizations. They also emphasize the importance of strengthening relations with Latin America, especially with those countries that share a common history and culture with Spain.

Finally, regarding the environment and energy, Vox proposes policies for a more rational and sustainable use of natural resources. At the same time, they defend nuclear energy as a viable alternative to guarantee energy security and reduce dependence on external sources. These proposals reflect the party's vision of resource management and environmental protection in the context of a modern and efficient economy.

### ***Micro and Macro Levels, the "Us" and the "Them"***

In the analysis of the electoral programs of the main parties in the Spanish general elections of 2023 (PSOE, PP, VOX and Sumar), a discourse of polarization is clearly observed in the construction of an "us" and a "them". This micro discursive level, in which the rhetorical strategies of each party are manifested, reflects the way in which political identities are constructed in relation to otherness.

On the one hand, parties such as VOX made explicit use of this dichotomy, characterizing "us" as the defenders of national unity, sovereignty and traditional values, while "them" were portrayed as those who promote separatism, uncontrolled immigration and "globalist" policies. This type of discourse is common in right-wing populist movements, where "we" is associated with a homogeneous nationalist identity, and "they" with perceived threats to that unity, such as immigrants or political and economic elites.

In contrast, Sumar and PSOE employed a narrative that also marked distances, although in a different way. Here, the "we" was associated with the working classes, vulnerable social sectors and those who advocate for equality and social rights. The "they", in this case, was identified with the privileged and conservative sectors that, according to their discourse, try to stop the advance of social and economic rights, such as big businessmen or the elites that supposedly perpetuate inequalities.

The Popular Party (PP), although less marked by polarizing rhetoric, also made use of this distinction, presenting its "us" as the defenders of stability, economic progress and national unity, and placing "them" (in reference to leftist or separatist parties) as responsible for economic stagnation and territorial fragmentation.

This mechanism of ideological polarization is key to understanding how each party defines its identity in opposition to the other. The use of adjectives, attributes and roles given to both their own and others serves to reinforce a vision of the world in terms of political and social conflict, and to mobilize their respective constituencies around a common cause and a defined adversary.

At the micro and macro levels, a marked discursive polarization between the different political actors is evident. This phenomenon is observed through the distinction between an "us" and a "them", which is constructed through specific rhetorical strategies. These strategies of discursive polarization are fundamental in the configuration of political identities and electoral mobilization, since they reinforce group membership in the face of otherness. This analysis highlights how the Spanish political discourse of 2023 is articulated around these ideologies, which in turn reflects the growing fragmentation of the political landscape.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

In Spain's 2023 general elections, electoral programs played a key role in informing voters, structuring the debate and fostering accountability. The analysis of the proposals of Vox, PSOE, PP and Sumar reveals coincidences in the concern for the economy and employment, although with different approaches: while PP and Vox proposed tax reductions and support to the private sector, PSOE and Sumar bet on a greater redistribution of wealth, minimum wage increases and strengthening of public services. Economic recovery after the pandemic was a common focus, but with ideologically opposed solutions.

Another area of consensus was the energy crisis and the need to move towards a green transition. However, the differences between the parties were evident in the way they approached this issue. While Vox was reluctant to fully embrace the global climate agenda, criticizing environmental policies and proposing a more intensive use of natural resources, the other parties bet on renewable energies, albeit with nuances. The PSOE and Sumar defended a progressive ecological transition, proposing policies to reduce emissions and promote clean energy, while the PP was more moderate, proposing a balance between sustainability and support for key industrial sectors.

The biggest differences between the 2023 electoral programs centered on social and territorial rights. Vox adopted a conservative and nationalist stance, proposing to eliminate autonomies and rejecting gender equality laws and LGTBIQ+ rights. In contrast, PSOE and Sumar defended and sought to expand these rights, with Sumar standing out for its progressive labor proposals, such as the 32-hour workday. The PP was in an intermediate position, with moderate criticism of some PSOE laws, but without going to the extreme of Vox.

In territorial matters, Vox and the PP opted for a more centralized model, Vox being the most radical. The PSOE defended the current autonomous system, promoting cooperation, while Sumar proposed decentralization with a focus on social cohesion. Although the four parties shared concerns such as the economy and energy transition, their ideological differences were clear on social, territorial and fiscal issues: Vox adopted conservative and centralist positions; Sumar and PSOE, progressive and decentralizing approaches; and the PP was somewhere between economic liberalism and social conservatism.

The dichotomy "us" versus "them" (Van Dijk, 2003) is present in all parties in 2023 as part of an identity construction that defines one's own group versus an adversary. Vox employs a national-populist narrative (Capdevila et al., 2022), with an "us" that defends national unity against a "them" composed of immigrants, separatists and globalist elites.

PSOE and Sumar build an inclusive "us", linked to social rights and the working classes, as opposed to a "them" associated with privileges. The PP also resorts to this logic, although with a more moderate tone, presenting itself as the guarantor of order. This ideological confrontation reinforces party identities and emotionally mobilizes the electorate (Díez Gutiérrez and Gajardo Espinoza, 2020), but it also evidences the fragmentation of the system and can deteriorate the democratic debate (Nieto-Jiménez, 2022).

According to Saffirio (2024), programmatic political discourse has been deeply conditioned by three key dynamics: ideological polarization, parliamentary fragmentation and the growing mediatization of politics. These transformations affect both the content and the form of electoral programs, which now function not only as instruments of proposal and accountability, but also as tools for identity construction and symbolic mobilization.

Polarization, as also recognized by Gamir-Ríos et al. (2022) in the 2019 elections, accentuated in 2023 a binary rhetoric of "us" versus "them," reinforcing partisan identities and simplifying public debate. The fragmentation of the political system forced the parties to clearly define their ideological positions, especially on key issues such as the economy, social rights, ecology and the territorial model. Although there were thematic coincidences, the discursive differences evidenced a struggle to impose their own interpretative frameworks. Overall, the programs reflect a political discourse adapted to a fragmented and media context, focused more on conflict and identity than on detailed proposals, which poses challenges for democratic quality and political deliberation.

This work has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting its results. The analysis is limited to a single electoral campaign, which prevents the identification of discursive changes over time. A longitudinal comparison with other elections would make it possible to observe the evolution of programmatic strategies and enrich the study.

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