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## **Unboxing History: The Mobilization of History in the Discursive Construction of Eurosceptic Arguments**

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### **Citation**

Arvanites, D. (2022). *Unboxing History: The Mobilization of History in the Discursive Construction of Eurosceptic Arguments*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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# UNBOXING HISTORY

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The Mobilization of History in the Discursive Construction of  
Euroseptic Arguments

Thesis MA International Relations: Global Order in Historical Perspective

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Word Count: 15,000

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## 1. Introduction

*“In this square, there are no extremists. There are no racists. There are no fascists.... The extremists are those who have ruled Europe for twenty years in the name of poverty and uncertainty. These are the extremists” (milorenteggio, 2019, 58:27-58:56).*

*“This harassment is actually a lynching and harassment of democracy, the right to dissent, the freedom to think differently, and the duty to rebel against those who intend to impose a totalitarian discourse.... These attacks were instigated by several members of this parliament, one of which decreed the anti-fascist alert to turn our voters into a species of Nazi monsters that must be exterminated” (VOX España, 2019b, 14:16-14:44).*

These quotes, taken from speeches by the leaders of far-right Eurosceptic parties Lega (Italy) and VOX (Spain), demonstrate an instance in which like-minded parties from different countries used history to construct similar political arguments, specifically the defense of their views despite being compared to fascists that inhabit each country’s past. However, the use of history in the construction of political arguments is not limited to these parties, this issue, or these countries. As demonstrated by numerous scholars such as Daddow (2007), Kaarbo and Kenealy (2017), Lebow (2006), and Müller (2002), history is a widely used rhetorical device in politics with the aims of legitimizing and justifying certain policies and opinions. It is instrumental in the construction of identities making it highly emotive, and drawing from the past to make arguments in the present creates a sense of “instant legitimacy”, both of which allow political actors to achieve their goals more easily (Daddow, 2007; Müller, 2002, p.27). While it is clear how and why actors use history, one area that lacks scholarly attention is how this tool features in the discursive construction of Eurosceptic arguments. Therefore, this thesis aims to address this gap guided by the question: “How do Eurosceptic parties mobilize history in the discursive construction of Eurosceptic arguments?”

This question not only contributes to the research on the use of history in politics, but also to the that of Euroscepticism; while much has been written on this topic ranging from conceptualizations to the drivers of Eurosceptic attitudes, one under researched element is *how* Eurosceptics operationalize Euroscepticism to achieve their goals. Additionally, most of the

literature that does exist within this intersection focuses specifically on far-right Eurosceptic and populist parties, and there is a need for more studies of a comparative nature. Therefore, in an approach inspired by Petrović (2019), this thesis aims to move beyond the existing literature through a deeper analysis of both right- and left-wing parties, as well as how the national context and ideology of a party may influence how history is mobilized. As such, the research question is investigated through an analysis of the discourse of four Eurosceptic parties from two different – yet, comparable – countries: Lega and Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) in Italy, and VOX and Podemos in Spain.

It is evident from the starting quotes that Lega and VOX use history as a rhetorical device, and the same rings true for M5S and Podemos. In analyzing speeches and manifestos surrounding their 2018 and 2019 national elections and the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections, it became apparent that these parties mobilize history in many of the ways and for multiple reasons presented by scholars; in order to legitimize Eurosceptic arguments and achieve their goals, they drew from various national and non-national events and historical figures, and advanced the notion that certain aspects of history must be protected from the European Union (EU) in its current form.

Understanding how Eurosceptic parties mobilize history is extremely relevant as Euroscepticism continues to spread across the continent, even into historically supportive countries, and features in the rhetoric not only of marginal parties but also those who lead governments and make crucial decisions regarding the future of the EU (Brack & Startin, 2015; Petrović, 2019). We have already seen how utilizing history can contribute to the polarization between nations and the EU through the Brexit debate and vote, and therefore, further understanding its use by Eurosceptic parties may lead to a clearer picture of how cleavage structures within the EU are deepened (Petrović, 2019). Furthermore, the use of history may contribute more generally to the development of cleavage structures outside of the European context, and thus research that adds to this field of study may have wider implications.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 provides a thorough overview of the existing literature on how and why political actors mobilize history, the field of Euroscepticism and what is still lacking, and what is known about the crossover between these two fields. Chapter 3 then sets out the design of the study, including the cases, sources, and research methodology. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the analysis for each case, as well as a

comparative analysis section to synthesize the findings and highlight the patterns found between cases. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the research and discusses the implications of the study, as well as how future research might move forward.

## **2. Literature Review**

There is a vast amount of literature in both the fields of Euroscepticism and the use of history by political actors in the formation and justification of political arguments. While some studies that combine these two topics do exist, there is still much work to be done in this area. The following review provides an overview of what is known about how and why political actors mobilize history with examples; a background of Euroscepticism research and what is still lacking; what has been written so far about the link between the mobilization of history and the construction of Eurosceptic arguments by Eurosceptic parties; and the justification for performing research to further explore and strengthen this link.

### **2.1 Mobilization of History by Political Actors**

It is well documented that political actors reference history when formulating and justifying policies, and there are a multitude of concepts explored within this domain. Some scholars investigate the use of history in politics using the terms “collective” or “national memories”, which are broadly the shared memories of an event held by a group which are subject to manipulation by elites to serve their current interests (Berger, 2002; Klymenko & Siddi, 2020; Müller, 2002; Petrović, 2019; Siddi 2020). Others use the term “historical analogy”, or the use of the past to make decisions in the present (Chilton, 2004; Kaarbo & Kenealy, 2016). In some cases, the more general terms “history”, “historical grievances”, or “historical narratives” are used (Broad & Daddow, 2010; Daddow, 2007; Petrović, 2019).

Regardless of the terminology, many similar conclusions can be drawn about how history is mobilized in politics. History is essentially kept in storage, and policymakers can decide when and how to bring it, or certain parts of it, to light. Generally, actors use (or abuse) this history to “advance their political, economic, and social goals,” as well as to legitimize, rationalize, and

justify policy positions, which can be done in several ways (Chilton, 2004; Daddow, 2007; Kaarbo & Kenealy, 2017; Lebow, 2006, p.4; Müller, 2002).

First, history can be used as evidence, a sort of “learning lessons from the past”, commonly in the form of the abovementioned concept of historical analogy (Müller, 2002). Of course, this “learning” is subjective to one’s interpretation of history, so past events that political actors *deem* as resembling a current situation can be drawn from as a reason to – or not to – propose a course of action (Kaarbo & Kenealy, 2017). Kaarbo and Kenealy (2017) present multiple examples, including how political parties referenced the 2003 international intervention in Iraq as a reason why the UK should or should not become involved in Syria during the UK House of Commons vote in 2013. In addition, Miller (2016) discusses how US policymakers used “lessons” from the Vietnam War, among other events, in deliberations regarding actions in Afghanistan. Beneficial or not, these “mental shortcuts” are not uncommon in policymaking (Kaarbo & Kenealy, 2017, p.69; Miller, 2016, p.446).

Furthermore, history is considered an important part of identity construction of the “self” and “other” at levels ranging from the individual to the nation and beyond, and is “established by what is remembered and leads in turn to certain pasts being remembered or forgotten” (Müller, 2002, p.21). This is in line with what Siddi (2020, p.1033) labels as “selective” memory, in which certain aspects of the past are silenced. Moreover, according to Daddow (2007), when it comes to identity “politicians wishing to garner support for their policies have to be seen to be acting in consonance with the vague yet symbolic concept of the ‘national interest’” (Daddow, 2007, p.588). These three points exemplify that political actors can choose which parts of history they want to contribute to certain group identities, and thus what constitutes national interest to legitimize policies and political arguments. One example is within the long-standing debate over Europe in the UK. As discussed by Broad and Daddow (2010) and Deighton (2002, p.115), former Prime Minister Tony Blair used aspects of British history and identity, including “Britain’s historical role as a ‘leader of nations’” – even if paradoxically at times – to make arguments that involvement in Europe is in line with national interest, while other politicians used it to argue the opposite.

Finally, Müller (2002, p.15) discusses the concept of “recovery of memory.” The idea is that in an increasingly modernized and globalized world, some elements of history become less salient and spatial elements such as territory and distance are increasingly blurred. Therefore, parts

of history are often mobilized to “preserve and recover” said history, as well as to mitigate the loss of spatial boundaries by means of a “temporal re-anchoring” (Müller, 2002, p.15). This is not an exhaustive list, nor are these mechanisms mutually exclusive. However, overall, it is clear that “interpretations of the past are a common tool utilized in politics” (Lähdesmäki, 2020, p.191).

## 2.2 Euroscepticism Overview

As this thesis focuses on Euroscepticism and Eurosceptic parties, it is important to establish a brief overview of the subject. Euroscepticism has become a heavily researched topic in the wake of the Maastricht Treaty signing in 1992 that established the more heavily integrated EU in lieu of the European Economic Community (EEC), the recent Eurozone and migrant crises, and the associated rise in Eurosceptic parties throughout the continent. There are many branches of study within the field, including conceptualizations, directions of influence, and drivers of Euroscepticism.

The task of formulating a definitive conceptualization has been tackled by many, yet there is still a lack of conceptual consensus. Those that exist can be broadly broken down into Euroscepticism focused on political parties (see Mudde & Kopecky, 2002; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008) and those centered on public attitudes (see Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Krouwel & Abts, 2007; Wessels, 2007). However, there are common features of each conceptualization: parties and people labeled as Eurosceptic hold anti-EU sentiments; these sentiments can include opposing certain elements of the EU such as the common currency, its supranational structure, and other Member States, or the project as a whole; there are varying degrees to which they can be Eurosceptic; and the phenomenon is not limited to the political left or right. Additionally, there are debates over whether to label Euroscepticism as a true political ideology or a strategy used to gain success (see Flood & Soborski, 2018), and whether it is an elite-driven, mass-driven, or more cyclical phenomenon (see Carrubba, 2001; De Vries 2018; de Wilde et al., 2018; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Sus & Hadeed, 2021).

These debates feed into the important question of what the drivers behind Euroscepticism are. Scholars have set forth explanations that include economic factors, identity factors, and governance factors (see De Vries, 2018; Hooghe & Marks, 2005, 2009; Longo & Murray, 2015;

Vasilopoulou, 2018). However, these are not incompatible as arguments can be made related to more than one set of factors simultaneously. At a basic level, Eurosceptic elites aim to capitalize on or evoke fears and grievances related to these drivers through targeting specific aspects of the EU and blaming them for said grievances (Brack & Startin, 2015; Hooghe, 2007; Kaya & De Cesari, 2020). For example, they may target immigration and multiculturalist policies, the common currency, austerity measures, elites, the structure of the EU, input and output legitimacy – the former referring to the ability of parties and citizens to directly participate through clear links to the decision-making process, the latter concerning the “effectiveness of policy outcomes for the benefit of citizens” (Longo & Murray, 2015, p.56) – etc.

Based on the presented information, a Eurosceptic party is, therefore, a party that holds some degree of opposition towards the EU, from any position on the left or right spectrum, that capitalizes on issues related to one or more of the Eurosceptic drivers. While substantial research has been done on the subject and many important questions have been addressed, studies investigating the ways in which Eurosceptic parties operationalize their Euroscepticism to achieve their goals are much more elusive. This is the area of Euroscepticism studies to which this thesis aims to contribute.

### 2.3 Mobilization of History by Eurosceptic Parties

It has been firmly established that much has been written about the use of history by political actors, as well as about Euroscepticism in general. However, an area given less attention in the literature in both fields is how Eurosceptic parties mobilize history to discursively construct Eurosceptic arguments. Some literature related to this intersection does exist, and in analyzing this literature, some general patterns can be deduced. It is important to note that the studies are a mix of academic analyses on how populist parties as well as Eurosceptics use history; however, because there is considerable overlap between the two in Europe – including the cases examined for this thesis – they give valuable insight (Rooduijn et al., 2019).

In general, when it comes to European politics, history is quite subjective as political actors across the continent can mobilize history in ways that either support or oppose the EU (Petrović, 2019). Eurosceptic parties use history for the latter, often in one, or a combination, of two general

patterns: portraying history as something that is under threat and in need of protection, and/or using specific historical references to support their arguments. According to Petrović (2019, p.364), the overarching goal of this use of history is “to contest the official EU narrative of the peaceful and prosperous continental integration that was able to overcome the destructions of two world wars and the Cold War divisions”. Moreover, it is often used in the process of “othering” and the advancement of “us versus them” dichotomies. These binaries can take many forms – the people versus elites, the nation versus the EU, the European community versus non-European peoples, etc. – and each requires identity constructions of *what* and *who* compose these categories. This can be done using history and may change depending on the goals of the party (Kaya & De Cesari, 2020; Lähdesmäki, 2020; Petrović, 2019).

National identity is often discussed by populists and Eurosceptics as stemming from common values, traditions, memories, and culture, as well as national political sovereignty (Lähdesmäki, 2020). The link between history and national identity is important considering that “perceptions of history shape national identity constructions and by extension constructions of the idea of Europe” (Daddow, 2007, p.585). To advance Eurosceptic arguments, then, parties can frame these important aspects of national history and identity as being threatened by the EU and its policies, such as those regarding immigration and economics that propel multiculturalism, economic burdens, and the loss of national sovereignty (De Cesari et al., 2020; Kaya & De Cesari, 2020). This leads to feelings of “socio-economic deprivation” and “nostalgic deprivation” – a feeling of loss due to the degradation of national identity and heritage brought about by globalization – amongst the people, which Eurosceptic parties can capitalize on to construct and justify arguments (Gest et al., 2017, as cited in Kaya & De Cesari, 2020, p.11; Kaya & De Cesari, 2020, pp.8-10). For example, they may do so to support the “naturalization of a Europe of nation-states”, which calls for a Europe that is multinational in which each nation-state maintains its own national culture, heritage, history, and sovereignty, and the EU elites are the “other” (Lähdesmäki, 2020, p.206).

Similarly, parties can use this mechanism of referring to history as something that is threatened by the EU but oriented towards the history, memories, culture, heritage, and traditions of Europe rather than the nation. In her work on the Finn’s Party – a populist, far-right Eurosceptic party in Finland – Lähdesmäki (2020) identifies a few discourses related to this topic, including

the construction of Europe as a cultural-religious-moral entity and the defense of Europe's liberal heritage. The former includes suggesting that Christianity is the root of common values in Europe and framing certain EU policies as threatening these roots. The latter often involves the discursive defense of what a party believes to be "European" and/or "Western" values, through "civilizationism" rhetoric rather than strict nationalism (Lähdesmäki, 2020, p.204).

These themes are also supported by arguments of other scholars who posit that shared European history, heritage, and civilization are frequently framed as rooted in Greek, Roman, and Christian traditions that must be defended against the multiculturalism and globalization promoted by the EU (De Cesari et al., 2020; Thran & Boehnke, 2015). De Cesari et al. (2020, p.40) labels this desire to defend European history and heritage in the advancement of anti-EU sentiments as a "reactionary mobilization of Europeanness," which leads to a "transnational layer of historical imagery" regarding *what* Europe is and *who* is European (Lähdesmäki, 2020, p.191). This rhetoric of defending "Europeanness" can be seen in the justification of many anti-immigration and Eurosceptic arguments (Kaya & De Cesari, 2020).

Furthermore, parties can use specific historical references to advance and legitimize Eurosceptic arguments including historical figures, events, and periods in history emanating from the history of the nation, other countries and Member States, the EU and/or Europe as a whole, or the world. References are often used either in the construction of identities or on their own, and multiple examples can be found in existing studies such as dictatorship eras, wars, feuds with other Member States, and periods of colonialism or empire.

For instance, Petrović (2019) explains how events from right-wing dictatorship eras have been utilized by left-wing Eurosceptic parties in Southern Europe in the wake of the Eurozone crisis, how legacies of World War II and national shame have become major talking points for far-right parties in France and Germany, and how references to the communist dictatorship era have contributed to narratives of Euroscepticism and Western betrayal in far-right parties in Eastern Europe. In addition, Eurosceptic parties have been known to criticize other Member States, often using history to do so. For example, in 2015, Pablo Iglesias "played the card of German imperialism" in his comment that Spain would "never again be a periphery of Germany" (Iglesias 2015, as cited in Petrović, 2019, p. 373).

Finally, many European countries have imperial and colonial pasts which parties can draw from – or choose not to acknowledge – in the construction of Eurosceptic arguments. For example, both Siddi (2020) and Proglione (2020) discuss how Italy’s lack of acknowledgment, or “forgetting”, of its colonial past is reflected in anti-EU sentiments regarding immigration policies and the subsequent threats to identity. This contributes the idea that Eurosceptic parties often make calls to return to a previous period, with the sentiment that the negative impacts of the EU would be vanquished. For instance, the influx of immigrants in Europe has led to calls to return to “old pre-immigrant Europe,” and therefore a return of national sovereignty; however, this version of Europe that was “disentangled and distinct from the rest of the world” never existed, yet the idea of it remains in populist and Eurosceptic discourse (De Cesari et al., 2020, p.37). Parties can use this view of Europe to justify racist rhetoric disguised as cultural incompatibility to strengthen national and European identities, and to legitimize claims that the EU is largely at fault for allowing the influx of migrants (De Cesari et al., 2020).

While the reviewed literature provides a solid basis for how political actors utilize history, including some of the ways in which Eurosceptic parties do so, there is much more to be discovered on this topic. It is clear that there is no set way to mobilize history in the formation of political arguments, and in the context of Eurosceptic arguments, there is an “entanglement of Europe, culture, history, and heritage” in Eurosceptic discourse that “is not static or stable but a flexible ‘web of meanings’ in which new discursive links and ideological connections are constantly in the making” (Lähdesmäki, 2020, p.198).

#### 2.4 Relevance and Strengthening the Link

This “web of meanings” and the intersection between the use of history and the construction of Eurosceptic arguments warrants more scholarly attention. While scholars have undoubtedly begun to ask questions and explore this area, the role of history and memory in populist arguments has largely been overlooked in that it has “slipped through the cracks between the humanities and social sciences,” and the same could be said for Eurosceptic arguments (Kaya and De Cesari, 2020, p.15).

Within this gap, Petrović (2019) has introduced the idea that observing this intersection with a more nuanced look at both party ideology and national context could provide a deeper understanding of how and why history is mobilized by Eurosceptic parties. It is evident in the literature that there are overarching similarities in the ways that Eurosceptic parties do so, and that some histories are seemingly transnational and present in the European public sphere (Petrović, 2019). However, much of this work is oriented towards right-wing populists and Eurosceptics. When both left- and right-wing parties are included, it is apparent that they may draw on different aspects of history (Kaya & De Cesari, 2020; Petrović 2019). This begs the question of whether parties with similar ideologies or of the same national context use history in similar ways and vice versa, or if a pattern is not that clean-cut. This under-researched area is also worth examining.

Overall, this thesis aims to contribute to the existing scholarship on how Eurosceptic parties discursively construct Eurosceptic arguments, specifically by examining their mobilization of history in this process. A thesis of a comparative nature can go a step beyond much of the analyzed literature and help to shed light on the idea of variations based on ideology and national context. There are questions as to whether the EU will “survive this return of history,” and thus it is important to continue to work towards understanding it (Petrović, 2019, p.379).

### **3. Research Design**

#### **3.1 Political Discourse Analysis**

This thesis utilized a qualitative political discourse analysis on selected manifestos and political speeches produced by the Eurosceptic parties Lega, M5S, VOX and Podemos. Discourse analysis is a qualitative method of research that “focuses on interpretation of linguistic forms of communication,” which can be both spoken and written (Lamont & Boduszyński, 2020, p.126). Broadly, it aims to understand “how language constitutes and produces the world around us” (Lamont & Boduszyński, 2020, p.127). Unlike more quantitative forms of analysis, this approach highlights the importance of context, seeing as “discourses have no inherent meaning in themselves and, to understand their constructive effects, researchers must locate them historically and socially” (Hardy, Harley, & Phillips, 2004). Therefore, it is a very fruitful way to analyze the

use of history to construct political arguments, as both language and context are crucial to the research question.

Regarding political discourse analysis specifically, it is a strong methodological choice for gaining a deeper understanding of political argumentation, seeing as politics is reliant on language and political practices are almost fully discursive (Chilton, 2004; Van Dijk, 2006). Political discourse can be defined as the “use of language that humans... tend to recognize as ‘political’” (Chilton, 2004, p.201). As such, political speeches and manifestos fall comfortably into this category. Because political actors are aware that language has power and “seek to accomplish things when they talk or write,” this form of analysis is interested in uncovering and understanding the strategies used to achieve the desired effects of certain discourses (Bryman, 2004, p.201; Chilton, 2004). Therefore, it was the best fit for understanding how history is used as a strategy in the discursive construction of Eurosceptic arguments.

This method is, of course, not without limitations. First, there are debates over what constitutes language and discourse (Schneider, 2013a). However, for the purposes of this thesis, Lamont and Boduszyński’s (2020, p.126) definition of written or spoken linguistic forms of communication was used. Moreover, the approach does not truly reveal what political actors believe (Schneider, 2013b). However, considering that the goal of this research was to analyze *how* history is used and not what political actors truly believe about it, this limitation did not present an obstacle to the research.

### 3.2 Case Selection Strategy

Case selection is crucial to any study, as cases provide “a detailed illustration of a theme of wider interest” and contribute to the wider applicability of the research (Hague & Harrop, 2013, p.361). This thesis examined the mobilization of history by Eurosceptic parties across both ideological and national lines, and therefore called for a comparative analysis. A focused, small-N comparison was used to analyze four Eurosceptic parties from two different countries: Lega and M5S in Italy and VOX and Podemos in Spain. The reason for this was two-fold. First, if two parties faced with the same national context but of different ideologies select similar elements of history, then this would demonstrate that national context may have more influence on the use of history.

However, if they use history differently and more in line with their party ideologies, then it would signify that ideology has more sway. Second, the use of two countries and two sets of parties allows us to discern if any patterns exist in more than one example: if in Italian parties use history similarly on the one hand and Spanish parties do on the other, this would strengthen the argument that national context has more influence. However, if like-minded parties from different national contexts use history similarly, this would strengthen the opposite argument.

The parties were chosen based on two criteria: the party pairs have similar ideologies and political agendas, and they are the most prominent Eurosceptic parties in their respective countries. Both VOX and Lega are populist far-right Eurosceptic parties that advance very nationalist and anti-immigration agendas (Poli & Valentiner, 2014; Real-Dato & Sojka, 2020; Triandafyllidou, 2003). Podemos and M5S are left-wing populist Eurosceptic parties with political priorities surrounding anti-austerity and the enhancement of direct democracy and social rights and justice (Mascitelli & Brunazzo, 2020; Petrović, 2019; Real-Dato & Sojka, 2020). It is important to note that in the case of M5S, it claims to be neither left- nor right-wing. However, considering that its main priorities lie in more traditionally left-wing policies, the 2019 Chapel Hill Survey categorizes it as leftist, and other scholars have compared M5S and Podemos before (for example, Caiani & Guerra, 2017; Font et al., 2019) the comparison could still be carried out with confidence (Jolly et al., 2019; Mascitelli & Brunazzo, 2020).

Considering that this study involves an element of cross-national comparison, it was important to choose countries that are, in fact, comparable. As such, Italy and Spain were chosen because they display similarities along many political, social, and economic lines in both the past and present, and the languages did not present major barriers to the research.

Politically, both countries have imperial and colonial pasts, suffered brutal right-wing dictatorships until the mid- to late-1900s, and subsequently underwent democratic transitions. In addition, they are both long-term EU Member States, defined in this case as having been Members during the Maastricht Treaty signing, and joined – or founded in the case of Italy – the EEC (later the EU) in part to move past their fascist legacies and to boost economic and international prestige (Jauregui, 2003; Ruiz Jiménez & Egea De Haro, 2011; Triandafyllidou, 2003). Furthermore, they have a history of political corruption and low trust in national government that have carried over to today (Mascitelli & Brunazzo, 2020; Real-Dato & Sojka, 2020; Triandafyllidou, 2003). Socially

and economically, they are some of Europe's main recipients of immigrants and are composed of autonomous regions that want to be increasingly independent, which characterizes much of their political landscapes (Jauregui, 2003; Mascitelli & Brunazzo, 2020; Triandafyllidou, 2003). Both also exhibit unemployment rates well above the EU average, and were deeply impacted by the Eurozone crisis as they were labeled as PIIGS countries (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain, the countries hurt most by the crisis) (Petrovic, 2019; Statista, 2021a; Statista, 2021b).

### 3.3 Source Selection Strategy

This thesis analyzed political manifestos and speeches produced by the chosen parties in the context of the 2018 Italian general elections, 2019 Spanish general elections, and 2019 EP elections. These sources were chosen because analyzing both a written and spoken medium presented various discursive methods, making the analysis of party discourse more fruitful. Other source options could have included the social media accounts of the party leaders or parties, however social media is more focused on individual opinions while speeches and manifestos are more party-oriented, thus a better match for the research question (Lamont & Boduszynski, 2020).

The manifestos from the March 2018 Italian general elections were examined for Lega and M5S while those from the April 2019 Spanish general elections were analyzed for VOX and Podemos. These were collected from the Manifesto Project Database in the original languages of each party. Furthermore, the chosen speeches were given by the main leaders of each party at the time: Luigi Di Maio of M5S, Matteo Salvini of Lega, Pablo Iglesias of Podemos, and Santiago Abascal of VOX. While there are many other politicians involved in each party, the leaders can be seen as the main "voices" of the parties. The speeches include campaign speeches, those given in national parliaments or the EP, and brief press conferences regarding political issues and elections. They were found online on YouTube.com – as they were very difficult to find elsewhere – and were taken from within approximately two months before and after each country's respective general elections and the May 2019 EP election.

This time frame was chosen firstly because these were the only national and EP elections in which all four parties had active influence. For both Podemos and VOX, these were only their second elections, and it was the only national election for VOX with a manifesto in the database,

which had to be taken into consideration. Moreover, these elections followed the spike of Eurosceptic party success in the 2014 EP elections and were situated in the aftermath of the Eurozone and migrant crises, of which the effects are still present. Therefore, studying the use of history from a more recent standpoint following major events provided richer material for analysis. Finally, a more synchronous analysis of specific discursive events was chosen – rather than a span of many years and elections – because it was more feasible to do a comprehensive analysis of two source types for multiple cases, and because this thesis did not aim to demonstrate how the use of history changes over time (Jäger, 2004, as cited in Schneider, 2013c).

It is important to note that there were two Spanish general elections in 2019, one in April and one in November. However, only the manifestos from April were analyzed as similar points were made again in November, and because the messages from the first round of elections may have been more authentic and not catered to the results of another. Additionally, while the majority of the speeches fall within the set timeframe and into the categories listed, there were a few exceptions due to the availability of data. However, these were still oriented towards relevant topics and did not fall too far beyond the timeframe, and therefore were not seen as major obstacles to the results.

### 3.4 Analysis Process

In line with suggestions by Schneider (2013b), the sources were first prepared for analysis. While the manifestos were already digital and in written format, the speeches were in video format. As such, they were transcribed – keeping the minute markers – to make it easier to sort through them to pinpoint statements of interest. Both were also translated into English from their original languages, as the translated quotes are used in the analysis findings. Once the sources were ready for examination, the analysis proceeded in multiple steps.

First, the sources were reviewed thoroughly to identify instances of the utilization of history in each manifesto and speech for each party. Once located, it was determined which instances contributed to Eurosceptic arguments based on the surrounding context. Next, the instances that were deemed to be mobilized for this purpose were analyzed more closely. Often in discourse analyses, discourse themes discovered in sources or expected to be found from

background reading are used as categories to organize the data (Schneider, 2013c). However, as demonstrated by the existing literature, there can be overlap in the ways in which history is mobilized by political actors, and multiple Eurosceptic arguments may be advanced in parallel. Therefore, the division of the instances into rigid categories was not only difficult but could have possibly diluted the subtleties of the use of history for each party. As such, each instance was scrutinized based on a list of predetermined characteristics taken from the different areas of the existing literature. These included looking for *how* history was used – historical analogies, “learning from the past” narratives, general identity construction, “us versus them” binary construction, selective memory, recovery of memory, framing history as under attack/in need of defense, and specific historical references. In tandem, it was determined which Eurosceptic arguments were being constructed by documenting the specific areas of the EU being targeted. These included, but were not limited to, immigration and multiculturalist policies, the common currency, austerity measures, elites, the structure of the EU, and input and output legitimacy.

The layered approach allowed for the painting of a more nuanced picture of how each case used history to construct Eurosceptic arguments. As such, it demonstrated more clearly the strategic ways in which this was carried out, therefore contributing to the overall goal of political discourse analysis. It also facilitated the making of highly detailed comparisons between cases, leading to a better grasp of the research question as well as the influence of ideology and national context. The results were subsequently written in a case-by-case manor along with an overarching comparative analysis.

## **4. Analysis Findings**

### 4.1 VOX

VOX’s rise was considered a bit of an anomaly, seeing as many people believed that Francisco Franco’s legacy would deter any far-right parties from forming and gaining power in Spain (Hedgecoe, 2019). However, formed in 2013, it became the country’s first far-right party in 40 years (Real-Dato & Sojka, 2020). It saw great success in both national elections in 2019, as it became the third largest party, and performed well in the 2019 EP elections. (Politico, n.d.b). This

analysis revealed that VOX used history on many occasions to assist in the discursive construction of Eurosceptic arguments, mainly with regards to identity factors.

One realm of argumentation that was particularly repetitive was that against immigration policies and multiculturalism propelled by the EU, made evident by multiple quotes throughout the speeches. For example, Abascal explained that pro-EU politicians at both the national and EU levels’ “enthusiasm for multiculturalism” (VOX España, 2019b, 21:20-21:22):

Reminds me a lot of the poem solution by **Bertolt Brecht** in which the author satirizes about how the people have disappointed their government and advises it to dissolve the people and choose a new one, because that multicultural nonsense of choosing a new people is what it seems many are proposing here, when it has already failed throughout Europe. (VOX, España, 2019b, 21:43-22:04)

In this quote, history was used in the form of a direct reference to Bertolt Brecht – a 20<sup>th</sup> century German poet and playwright (Poetry Foundation, n.d.) – to support the Eurosceptic argument that, essentially, elites are allowing immigration to replace their own people through policies that promote multiculturalism and immigration, which have not been successful across the continent.

Along similar lines, Abascal made the claim that “we have a great culture because we are proud of **Western civilization**, and we are not willing to undo it with the multiculturalism of the mass immigration to which globalist bureaucrats in Brussels condemn us” (El País, 2019, 99:50-100:03). Here, history – in the form of the cultures and traditions of Western civilization as a whole – was framed as threatened by policies of multiculturalism and immigration being advanced by EU elites, and the “civilizationist discourse”, matching the discourse pattern presented by Lähdesmäki (2020), assisted in the advancement of “us versus them” binaries between the people and the EU, as well as Western civilization and immigrants.

To remedy the situation, Abascal made calls to:

Look to our **roots and historical ties** because at this moment, in the face of globalism... there are alternatives. And we Spaniards are in a privileged position. We have the **great Hispanic sphere**. The Hispanic sphere that, through language and culture, unites us with millions of people around the world who are our brothers.... That is our strength. Those

must be our allies. With them, we have to stand side by side to **defend our identity, our culture, our historical work**. (VOX España, 2019a, 15:08-15:51)

History was used here in many ways. First, there is an indirect, yet implied, reference to Spanish empire and colonialism through the phrases “historical ties” and the “great Hispanic sphere.” Abascal used these historical ties to situate the Spanish identity within this Hispanic sphere, and then portrayed the historical aspects of it as being threatened by globalism and multiculturalism favored by the EU and pro-EU elites; in this sense, history helped to define a clear contrast between the Hispanic sphere and the EU. These ties were also used to justify the proposal that immigration should “[favor] nationalities that share a language and important **ties** of friendship and culture with Spain” (VOX, 2019, p.8), which the party believed could be a “possible solution for Europe” (VOX España, 2019b, 24:12). This added to Eurosceptic arguments targeting EU structure and immigration policies, seeing as alternative alliances and proposals were set forth. The overall sentiment, therefore, is that looking to historical ties would aid in the preservation of Spanish identity and culture, as well the identity of other countries throughout Europe if they were to follow the same model.

Furthermore, Abascal stated that:

We align with the **founding spirit of the [EU]** that the Visegrad countries defend today, among others. A model that is growing economically, generates security in society, supports families, and defends values that are genuinely European and not the multicultural society you want to impose on us. (VOX España, 2019c, 03:46-04:06)

History in this case was used in the form of defending the “founding spirit”, and therefore the historical underpinnings, of the EU, which falls partially in line with the desire to recover history (Müller, 2002). It supported Eurosceptic arguments related to both the EU’s multicultural lens, as well as the structure of the EU given the inclusion of the Visegrad countries. The Visegrad group is a non-institutionalized subregional group in the EU composed of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary which cooperate as independent states in the areas of economics, security, culture, and others (Dangerfield, 2020). Stating that this group represents and defends the “founding” and “genuinely European values” contributed to the proposal that Europe should be “a Europe of nation-states, and not a Europe of the regions and identitarianisms that threaten the unity of the great European nations, and therefore, the unity of Europe itself” (VOX, 2019, p.31). This

therefore followed the discourse patterns of the “naturalization of a Europe of nation-states” and defending “European values” in Eurosceptic discourse (Lähdesmäki, 2020).

Overall, these utilizations history to advance Eurosceptic arguments against multiculturalism and immigration policies can be synthesized into the main idea that multiculturalism is doing “nothing more than liquidating the Spanish [and European] identity by introducing remote cultures with different loyalties, different visions of the world” (VOX, España, 2019b, 21:20-21:32). Given this, voters were presented with an ultimatum in 2019: the choice between “the multicultural Europe or the Europe proud of our **Christian roots**,” the latter of which is promoted by VOX (VOX España, 2019a, 27:01-27:06). Establishing Europe’s roots as Christian – in line with the theme of constructing Europe as a religious entity – and framing them as under attack from EU policies drove a deeper wedge between Spain, the EU, and immigrants.

Other Eurosceptic arguments aided by the mobilization of history included those related to sovereignty. For example, Abascal expressed that:

The borders must be protected because there are Spaniards who **died** to protect them ... we are not going to accept that they tell us from outside, from Brussels, how we have to defend the walls of our house. (VOX España, 2019a, 14:35-15:06)

The vague reference to those who died in the past to defend the borders was used to justify the portrayal of the EU as an intruder in the “house” of Spain, and the idea that “a nation, just like a house, without walls ceases to be a home” (VOX, España, 2019b, 22:39-22:42). As such, this propelled Eurosceptic arguments regarding the loss of sovereignty resulting from EU membership and furthered “us versus them” binaries between the nation and the “outsiders” in Brussels.

Furthermore, history was used on multiple occasions to construct the idea that Spain is not respected enough in the EU. Abascal used historical references to promote that Spain could remain in Europe, “but a strong Spain, a Spain making itself respected” (El País, 2019, 98:11-98:14). And Spain should be, in the party’s opinion, respected “because we have a magnificent **history**” and “have given great examples to the world and Western civilization” (El País, 2019, 111:19-113:08). These include “the literature of Cervantes” and “Don Pelayo, El Cid, the Crusaders of Las Navas de Tolosa, Isabella the Catholic, Cardinal Cisneros ... Hernán Cortés, Francisco Pizarro” and many more (El País, 2019, 112:39-113:46). These specific references to important national historical

figures added to the construction of a strong Spanish identity to legitimize VOX's argument that this is the Spain that deserves more respect in Europe.

Likewise, Abascal claimed that under pro-EU leadership in Spain:

Spain **returns** to orbit around our French neighbor ... **once again** subordinating our interests and accepting the leftovers from the Franco-German deal ... which is not original because **Rajoy and Zapatero** already did it. We believe that Spain can be something more in Europe than the obedient buttons of Paris and Berlin. We believe that Spain must be respected in Europe. (VOX España, 2019c, 01:28-01:51)

This reference to Spain's historical and continuous submissiveness to other Member States France and Germany, made clear by the mentioning of two previous Prime Ministers, Rajoy and Zapatero, contributed to the construction of the argument that Spain should be more respected in the EU, rather than recipients of French and German "leftovers."

Finally, history was used to defend the party's identity from negative perceptions by the EU and pro-EU elites. In one speech, Abascal explained that that:

This harassment [of VOX] is actually a lynching and harassment of democracy, the right to dissent, the freedom to think differently, and the duty to rebel against those who intend to impose a totalitarian discourse.... These attacks were instigated by several members of this parliament, one of which decreed the anti-fascist alert to turn our voters into a species of Nazi monsters that must be exterminated. (VOX España, 2019b, 14:16-14:44)

This reference to fascism – and indirectly to Franco and his ideas – and Nazis were used to express how the party believes they are portrayed by pro-EU elites. However, by turning this negative portrayal around on elites and saying that *they* are in fact the ones resembling totalitarianism, Abascal constructed a message of hypocrisy.

#### 4.2 Podemos

Podemos was formed in 2014, spearheaded by political science professor Pablo Iglesias (Petrović, 2019). The party gained popularity in the wake of the Eurozone crisis which exacerbated economic grievances in Europe, especially southern Europe (Petrović, 2019). The party has been

quite successful since its formation, making it a major challenger of the informal two-party system that had been dominant in Spain for years (Real-Dato & Sojka, 2020). Though Podemos had the lowest number of instances of the use of history to construct Eurosceptic arguments, they were not non-existent, and mainly focused on economic factors.

One of the main targets of Eurosceptic discourse was austerity measures. For example, Iglesias explained that during and in the wake of the global financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis:

The same ones who had caused the disaster were given the authority of recuperation, with congregations around a single creed: that of austerity. Austerity forcefully shook Europe.... They were the cruel **years** of economic collapse, the exile of young people, of the return of painful poverty levels. Many lost, but a few won. They were also **years** of great business profits, of millionaire salaries, of corruption.... They affirm that theirs is the only truth, that any alternative is impossible. But they did not count on the fact that we had awakened. (Podemos, 2019d, 00:30-01:23)

The reference to the period of austerity and its associated negative consequences during the abovementioned crises contributed to Eurosceptic arguments in many ways. First, it advanced “us versus them” binaries between the people and the elites as the losers and winners of this time. Therefore, it backed direct criticisms of EU elites and output legitimacy, seeing as *they* caused the problem and their attempt at a solution – austerity – “devastated the social fabric of our societies” rather than easing the economic crisis, and thus did not benefit the people. These sentiments were further used to legitimize the demand for “the immediate relaxation of the tax corsets imposed by Brussels” (Podemos, 2019c, p.89). In relation to the end of the quote, Iglesias went on to say that this idea that the view of the elites is the only truth is inaccurate, and that “**history** is not going to be dictated to us from above.... **History** is written by *you*” (Podemos, 2019d 02:10-02:47). This portrayed the people’s perception of history as under attack by elite narratives, dictating policies and therefore the fate of Spaniards from above. Considering that it had already been established that this fate, in the case of austerity, was a tragic one, this instance added to Eurosceptic arguments regarding austerity, elites and output legitimacy.

This concept of the people’s perception of history as something to be defended was also present in the manifesto, in which the party proclaimed that “**history** is not written by banks, businesses, the polls, or the media,” but “**history** is written by *you*” (Podemos, 2019c, p.5). Given

that Podemos has often criticized the EU and mainstream pro-EU parties for prioritizing the needs of big business and banks over those of the people, this use of history contributed to similar Eurosceptic arguments as the quote above, specifically regarding elites and EU legitimacy. Both of these instances also can be viewed as portraying the idea that lessons must be learned from this history written by elites, and the people can begin to write a new one.

Along the lines of prioritizing big business and banks, Iglesias explained that “in this country, the power of the government has been a private reserve of the friends of the companies. That is why **Felipe González** and **Mariano Rajoy** call themselves **Winston Churchill**” (Podemos, 2019b, 16:39-16:49). He went on to mock this analogy in discussing the upcoming elections in November 2019, stating that “**Winston Churchill, Rajoy and González**, have mentioned a coalition government between the PP and the PSOE. A government to defend the economic interests of the big companies, so that Brussels is happy” (Podemos, 2019b, 26:05-26:23). This reference to Winston Churchill and the comparison made with two former Spanish Prime Ministers, though facetious, was a direct criticism of pro-EU elites. Also, EU output legitimacy and Spain’s position within the EU were called into question by expressing that the EU would be satisfied to have Spain ruled by a government that defends banks and big business rather than the people, portraying the Spanish government as a sort of puppet.

In a similar vein, but oriented more towards social rights and justice, Iglesias explained that:

Europe **was to some extent a promise** of social justice and respecting civil rights. The policies of neoliberal governance, the policies cited by the banks and multinationals that have destroyed the social rights of workers, are those that have opened the door to the success of the far right. The policies of Merkel are behind the birth of the extreme right. (Podemos, 2019a, 62:16-62:45)

Here, history in the form of the original promises of Europe was presented as being threatened and destroyed by EU policies that favor the priorities of banks and multinationals, further placing the EU’s output legitimacy into question. Furthermore, attaching Angela Merkel – German Chancellor from 2005-2021 and an austerity advocate during the financial crisis (Petrikowski, n.d.) – to these policies that have in part destroyed this original promise and opened the door to the far-right contributed directly to arguments surrounding anti-EU elite attitudes and criticisms of another Member State. Additionally, it indirectly targeted austerity.

### 4.3 Lega

Of the four cases, Lega is the oldest party and has remained prominent in elections over the years. It emerged in the wake of the corruption scandals and subsequent crumbling of the traditional Italian political system in the early 1990s, and has pushed ideas of preserving national identity, anti-immigration, and questioning the Economic and Monetary Union since the Maastricht Treaty signing (Triandafyllidou, 2003). The analysis uncovered that history was used in the construction of Eurosceptic arguments in these areas, as well as others.

First, there were many instances in which history was used to construct Eurosceptic arguments related to identity, specifically the identity of Europe. For example, right after the EP elections in May of 2019, Salvini made the statement that Lega would “try to save Europe by **bringing it back** to its **roots** and its **original** dream” (Ruptly, 2019, 00:17-00:23). A few days prior, he had described these roots as Judeo-Christian by citing **Pope Benedetto XVI** and explained the “**original** Europe” spoken of by **Pope John Paul II**, a “Europe of fraternity and the solidarity of all peoples who compose it” (milorenteggio, 2019, 59:31-59:34). These quotes exhibit both the portrayal of history as something to be defended – in this case, European history – as well as specific historical references. The direct references to two popes were used to legitimize the claim that the roots of Europe are Christian, in line with the discourse theme of constructing Europe as a religious entity presented in the literature. In relation to John Paul II, it is known that he believed that the Christian heritage of Europe must be preserved and exhibited by the EU and its Member States for it to succeed (Chelini-Pont, 2009). Therefore, the idea that they must “save” Europe by “bringing it back” to these roots and original dream advanced the argument that Europe’s Christian history and identity are under threat and must be protected from the current EU that has moved away from them.

Furthermore, regarding to the abovementioned “original dream” of Europe, Salvini raised the questions:

Who betrayed Europe? Who has betrayed one of the most **beautiful dreams hypothesized by the founding fathers**? The Europe of the peoples, of the nations, in which **de Gasperi**, **de Gaulle**, and **Margaret Thatcher** spoke of? It was betrayed by the **elites** and the strong powers that occupied this Europe in the name of finance, multinationals, the almighty dollar, and out-of-control migration. Merkel, Macron, Soros, Juncker! ... some of those

European Commissioners have destroyed the European dream” (milorenteggio, 2019, 61:16-62:19).

The use of history here contributed to identity perceptions of the original Europe and the European dream in conjunction with anti-EU elite sentiments. It was done so by framing European identity and history as under attack by elites, as well as through references to specific historical figures. In terms of what was hypothesized by the founding fathers, the EU was originally an endeavor of economic cooperation. Moreover, the figures mentioned, Alcide De Gasperi (a former Prime Minister of Italy), Charles de Gaulle (a former President of France), and Margaret Thatcher (a former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom), at the most basic level were not necessarily against cooperation in Europe at an economic level, as long as it was not at the expense of the individual state and sovereignty (European Union, n.d.). Therefore, by using these references to define the “European dream”, the party criticized not only elites and their policies, but also the supranational structure that has led to loss of sovereignty and the blurring of separate nations, losing sight of the original goals.

Along the lines of the EU originally being a more economic endeavor, Lega set forth that they:

Want to remain within the [EU] only on the condition that we re-discuss all the treaties that place constraints on the exercise of our full and legitimate sovereignty, returning in fact to the [EEC] **prior to the Maastricht Treaty**. (Lega, 2018, p.9)

This period prior to the Maastricht Treaty was later described as “a form of free and peaceful cooperation between states of a purely economic nature” (Lega, 2018, p.9), and thus line with the “original dream”. The use of history in the form of a direct reference to the pre-Maastricht period therefore contributed to Eurosceptic arguments related to the structure and deeper integration of the EU since the Maastricht Treaty, and the associated loss of sovereignty.

In relation to deeper integration, history was mobilized to contest the possibility of granting EU membership to Turkey. Looking back to the earlier quote referencing Pope John Paul II, Salvini made the statement that he “spoke of unity of differences but did not speak of Turkey in Europe because it is not and never will be in Europe” (milorenteggio, 2019, 59:50-59:53). He also expressed in front of the EP in 2018 that:

[Turkey] does not recognize the **genocide of one and a half million Armenian citizens** as the first **Holocaust** in history and therefore I am ashamed of the very idea that such a dictator [Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, leader of Turkey] can easily be welcomed with full honors in a country like mine and that someone thinks that Turkey can enter Europe. (Matteo Salvini, 2018, 01:21-01:37)

As previously mentioned, Pope John Paul II believed in the preservation of the Christian roots of Europe. Therefore, this reference was used to justify that if he did not speak of Turkey in Europe, then Turkish accession could put this piece of European history at risk, once again reflecting the pattern of constructing Europe as a religious entity. In addition, the second quote on the subject specifically referenced the Armenian genocide in 1915, and Salvini used Turkey's failure to recognize this part of its history to build an argument against its hypothetical accession.

Furthermore, Lega utilized history in the defense of the identity and ideas of the party against negative perceptions from across Europe and the EU. In a speech in 2019, Salvini made the statement that:

In this square, there are no extremists. There are no racists. There are no **fascists**. But rather in Italy and in Europe, the difference is between those who **look ahead**, those who **speak of the future**, who **construct a dream**, who speak of work, and those who instead **prosecute the ghosts of the past** that do not return, and speak about the **past** because they have no idea of the **future**. (milorenteggio, 2019, 57:47-58:21)

This past-future dichotomy regarding the views of the EU versus those of the party was very common in Lega's discourse, and the "ghosts of the past" reference – repeated more than once – can be understood as a historical reference to fascism and thus elements of Mussolini's dictatorship. However, Salvini turned this "extremist" rhetoric back on elites:

We gladly leave to others the fears of **ghosts of the past**. Together we are constructing the **future**. Here there is no far right, there is politics of common sense. The extremists are those who have ruled Europe **for twenty years** in the name of poverty and uncertainty. These are the extremists. (milorenteggio, 2019, 58:27-58:56)

In addition, Salvini pondered:

I wonder if this rabid **anti-fascism** that is vented in the streets today, **when fascism is over**, is a weapon of distraction that the ruling class uses on students and workers to limit dissent, to push the masses to fight a non-existent enemy while modern consumerism creeps into an already dying society. (Lega Salvini Premier, 2018b, 57:32-58:00)

Overall, in addition to criticizing how the party is portrayed, these references to fascism and the past-future dichotomy were used to build the Eurosceptic argument that playing the fascism card is only a distraction, and that elites falsely point the finger at far-right parties like Lega when there are issues, when in reality, the elites cause them. As such, these references also added to “us versus them” binaries between the EU and the Italian people, specifically Lega supporters.

Likewise, Salvini made a comparison between the situation of Lega and that of Galileo. He explained that when Galileo:

Tried to say the Earth is not flat, it is round and revolves around the sun, they incarcerated him because he was a madman who challenged the established order. Thank you, because we are like Galileo. A peaceful army of madmen saving the future of our children. (milorenteggio, 2019, 76:40-77:03)

This reference in the form of an analogy was used to legitimize the position of the party and its role in changing Europe, as well as the idea that the constructed order of the EU is endangering the future of the people.

Moreover, in discussing issues oriented towards sovereignty and immigration, Lega expressed that asylum policies, “designed for an **era of reduced immigration**, should be rethought in a restrictive sense and leaving to the state full sovereignty over its borders. Migration policies should favor entries from more culturally similar countries” (Lega, 2018, p.23). This reference to a former period in which there was less immigration was used here to criticize current immigration policies as well as the loss of sovereignty that they entail. In addition, the reference assisted in the justification that policies should favor counties with similar cultures, which can be understood as a suggestion aimed at preserving national identity and culture.

In line with the idea of sovereignty over borders, Salvini made the statement that:

I do not understand why those who **once** lost their lives to defend the sacred soil of their community **were** heroes and whoever speaks **today** of defense of the homeland, of Italians first, and border controls is a dangerous person. We have had dangerous people in recent years in government that have led us to war at home. Not using tanks but using finance that has done more damage thanks to the EU than in the two previous **World Wars**. (Lega Salvini Premier, 2018b, 108:30-109:10)

This reference to the World Wars contributed to multiple Eurosceptic arguments. First, it once again contributed to the defense of the identity and perceptions of the party as seen earlier, using the past heroes who defended the borders as an example of what those who currently defend borders should be perceived as, rather than dangerous. In addition, the intense comparison between the financial damage caused by “dangerous” elites and the damage caused by the World Wars aided in the construction of arguments against elites, output legitimacy, and economic factors.

Finally, in relation to the finance portion at the end of the quote above, there were other instances of the mobilization of history to build Eurosceptic arguments related to economic factors. For instance, in combatting Europe’s desire to have governments raise taxes, Salvini referenced Winston Churchill and his analogy that “a nation that taxes itself in the hope of becoming richer is like a man standing in a bucket trying to lift himself from the handle” (milorenteggio, 2019, 77:42-77:58). This reference to one of the most well-known historical figures was used to construct and legitimize the contestation of EU fiscal policy, from which many Italians have suffered. These sentiments were also present in Salvini’s utilization of an (unsurprisingly) Biblical metaphor in reference to EU economic policies, stating that “we are David against Goliath. But history teaches that sometimes, if they are determined and coordinated, the little ones defeat the strong powers” (milorenteggio, 2019, 74:23-74:39). History here is framed as “learning lessons from the past,” seemingly regarding the general past of revolution, and contributed to “us versus them” binaries between the EU elites and the people of Italy.

#### 4.4 Movimento 5 Stelle

M5S has its origins in blogs and internet chats in the early 2000s and was converted to a larger online movement by comedian Beppe Grillo in 2009 (Mascitelli & Brunazzo, 2020). It saw high levels of success in both the 2013 and 2018 national elections as well as the 2014 and 2019

EP elections (Politico, n.d.a). The party has a very diverse agenda and many Eurosceptic opinions, and the analysis found that history was used to construct these opinions into arguments, mainly against economic factors.

First, austerity was a constant target. For instance, Di Maio made the statement that “the well-being of citizens, work, and sustainable growth are the **foundations** of the European project, but **for too long** these key principles have been replaced by rigor and austerity” (Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico [MiSE], 2019a, 03:13-03:24). Therefore, the main goal of the party was to “bring social rights and citizens’ rights back into fashion in Europe, which in **these years** have been smashed, massacred by initiatives linked to austerity” (M5sParlamento, 2019, 07:53-08:11). In these instances, history – specifically the foundations of Europe and thus the well-being of citizens – was presented as under attack by austerity. Not only did this contribute to the construction of anti-austerity arguments, but it was also used to challenge the output legitimacy of economic policies considering that they were more harmful than beneficial to the people. In addition, these sentiments exhibited a sense of wanting to recover the foundations that have been lost.

Later in the same speech, Di Maio expressed that “**history** is a great teacher, but it is essential that it be remembered to not repeat the same mistakes. We must **archive the period of austerity**” (MiSE, 2019a, 04:46-04:51). This direct reference to the period of austerity surrounding the Eurozone crisis as history to be learned from further contributed to the previous arguments, and was demonstrated again in Di Maio’s description of a letter received in 2018 from the EU criticizing Italy’s economic situation. He explained that it “shows that Europe has not learned anything from the **past**,” (MiSE, 2019b, 03:50-03:53) and that the EU cannot expect new results from austerity if “the recipe is **always** the same” (MiSE, 2019b, 04:40).

Other Eurosceptic arguments made using history included those targeting the euro. One main theme within this line of argumentation was that the euro negatively impacts southern Europe disproportionately to the north, as demonstrated by a string of quotes from the manifesto:

The history of monetary unions imposed by the “**center**” to the “**periphery**” (e.g., **West Germany with the East**) shows us the Italian scenario for the next few years: an Italy that produces low-cost labor for the countries of Northern Europe, a tourist “playground” for the rich countries of the North. The sacrifice of entire generations of southern European

countries to save the euro.... We already have on our conscience the **shameful management of Greece** where, in the name of saving the euro, we have humiliated a people. We would not want other countries, primarily Italy, to end up unjustly sold out, to save the crazy idea of a single and unattainable Economic Monetary System. **Greece** is the ultimate proof of how difficult or extremely complex it is, given the predatory level of current globalization, to get out of this “cage” alone (M5S, 2018, p.7)

The historical references to the German monetary union - when the currency of West Germany, the Deutsche Mark, was transferred to East Germany in 1990 following the fall of the Berlin Wall (Deutsche Bundesbank, 2015) – and Greece’s debt crisis can be seen as historical analogies of sorts, as they portray past experiences to be drawn from in the present. They contributed to multiple Eurosceptic arguments: those attacking the common currency and other Member States, as well as the structure and output legitimacy of the EU. The inclusion of East and West Germany along with the spatial metaphor of “center” and “periphery” – resembling colonialist language – made it clear that there is a division in the efficacy of the euro between the northern and southern countries in the EU, therefore calling its output legitimacy for the citizens in southern countries into question. In essence, it presented the “rich northern countries” as the center, and the southern states as the periphery, which created “us versus them” sentiments towards other Member States and criticized structural imbalances within the Union. The latter reference to Greece’s economic crisis also contributed to criticizing output legitimacy and structural imbalances, aided by the words “cage” and “predatory” as they portrayed southern European countries essentially as locked up animals in the economic system, proven in the case of Greece. These arguments led to the proposal of an alternative:

An alliance with the countries of southern Europe ... to definitively overcome the austerity policies linked to the single currency, making a common front in the negotiation field to obtain a profound reform of the [EU]. (M5S, 2018, p.7)

However, history was not only mobilized to construct Eurosceptic arguments against economic aspects of the EU, as it was also utilized in arguments related to immigration. For example, in explaining why there has been an influx of immigrants and refugees in Italy, Di Maio made two statements. First, that:

**France** is one of those countries that by printing a currency for fourteen African states prevents the development of those African states, and contributes to the departure of refugees who die in the Mediterranean or arrive on our shores” (Il Fatto Quotidiano, 2019, 00:08-00:26).

Second, that “in the case of Libya, if you remember, **in 2011** they saw a crazy bombing that caused us all the problems we are experiencing with immigration” (Il Fatto Quotidiano, 2019, 01:24-01:31).

The use of history in both cases are specific historical references, the former to France’s colonial past and the fact that many of its former colonies still use the CFA Franc, and the latter to the NATO air strikes – in which the French were involved – in Libya during the international intervention to ease tensions and ultimately overthrow Muammar Qadhafi in 2011 (NATO, 2015). Interestingly, he did not mention Italy’s own history in Libya, following the idea of selective memory presented by Siddi (2020). These references were mobilized to propel the criticism that “Europe must have the strength to face the issue of decolonization of Africa” and that “until we leave people in Africa in peace, they will continue to leave” (Il Fatto Quotidiano, 2019, 00:27-00:33, 03:35-03:47). They were also used to directly criticize another Member State, France, and its history. Overall, history was used here to push for the EU and Member States to start tackling the causes of immigration rather than the solutions, conveniently without including Italy’s past in these causes.

#### 4.5 Comparative Analysis

Based on the analysis findings, many similarities and differences can be observed between the cases. This synthesis of the findings presents general patterns to gain a deeper understanding of the research question and to shed light how party ideology and national context may impact the use of history. At the most basic level, all four cases used history on multiple occasions to construct and legitimize Eurosceptic arguments. In terms of which specific aspects of the EU were targeted, there was overlap in criticisms aimed at elites and other Member States, mainly Germany and France. Furthermore, history was used across the cases in the form of something in need of protection, specific historical references, and in the construction of various “us versus them”

binaries regarding the EU, which defined categories of identities depending on their goals, all in line with what is presented in the existing literature. One particular commonality was that each party referred to history, specifically the “founding spirit” (VOX), “original dream” (Lega), original “promises” (Podemos) and “foundations” of the EU project (M5S), as something to be protected and recovered. This falls in line with the idea that “all grievances were meant to be resolved by joining the EU”, but Eurosceptic parties use history in the present to combat this narrative (Petrović, 2019, p.371).

Zooming in on the findings of the far-right parties, it is unsurprising that they used history to advance many similar arguments given the agendas and ideologies of the parties. In terms of *how* they used history, multiple parallels were found, mainly regarding identity constructions and subsequent Eurosceptic arguments. For example, both parties constructed the history and identity of Europe as rooted in Christianity, which was then portrayed as under threat, reflecting ideas set forth by Lähdesmäki (2020). Additionally, many national references were used in the construction and defense of national and party identities. For instance, both parties mentioned the Italians and Spaniards who died defending their borders in the past as well as to national figures such as Galileo and Cervantes to serve these purposes. Moreover, in the defense of their parties against negative perceptions from the EU and pro-EU elites, both referenced fascism – and therefore indirectly their dictatorship eras – but used these negative perceptions to fire back at the elites. Finally, they referenced famous European historical figures – Bertolt Brecht in the case of VOX, and de Gasperi, de Gaulle, and Thatcher in the case of Lega – to explain that an EU true to its founding values and dreams has been threatened and destroyed by the current EU.

However, there are points of divergence within these commonalities. Despite serving similar purposes, the non-national references were drawn from very different parts of history. Also, while VOX simply stated that European roots are Christian, Lega backed this argument with references to two popes. Further, VOX used the threats to the founding values of the EU to argue for a Europe of nation-states, whereas Lega called for a return to the EEC of the pre-Maastricht period, although these were not dramatically different statements. Finally, VOX added the preservation of the history of Western civilization – reflecting “civilizationalism” discourse and the protection of Western values, presented by Lähdesmäki (2020) – and the Hispanic sphere into the equation. The party then used the latter, specifically its historical ties to the Hispanic sphere

and therefore an indirect reference to Spain's imperial/colonial past, to make the argument for more culturally similar immigration, while Lega used a reference to a previous era of less immigration.

For the left-wing parties, it was also unsurprising that they used history to construct many similar arguments, and there were a few points of comparison in how they did so. As previously mentioned, both parties framed the original promises and foundations of the EU project as under threat by the current EU. However, contrary to Lega and VOX, they constructed them more oriented towards the well-being and rights of the people. Also, they drew references from both national and international history, and one common reference being to the period of austerity that came with and after the global financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis. Both saw this period as history to be learned from moving forward regarding economic policies, reflecting ideas presented by Müller (2002). Finally, there were no explicit instances of using history in the defense of national identity. However, there were two main differences: M5S's inclusion of arguments related to immigration using references to France's colonial history and the international intervention in Libya in 2011, and Podemos' addition of the framing of the people's perception of history as threatened by the narratives and policies of EU elites.

Regarding parties of the same national contexts, both Italian parties used history to construct arguments based on economic factors despite ideological differences. They did so in part by using analogies – Lega's reference to Churchill related to taxation, and M5S's mention of the German monetary union, Greece's financial crisis, and the failures of austerity more generally – in line ideas from the existing literature. Similarly, they both explicitly stated that history is a teacher, reflecting Müller's (2002) idea of "lessons from the past." Beyond these similarities, most uses of history were very different. For example, in advancing arguments related to immigration, they used radically different references to construct them.

The Spanish parties also exhibited more differences than similarities despite sharing the same national history. While both mentioned elements of national and European history, the majority of references bore no resemblance. The only major crossover was their mobilization of history to describe the historical, and continuous, submissiveness of the pro-EU Spanish governments to the EU, and how this allegiance seems to come before the needs of the Spanish people, specifically mentioning Rajoy, Zapatero, and González.

Finally, there were other comparisons revealed in the analysis that were unexpected, yet notable. First, in the construction of immigration arguments, both VOX and M5S made references to colonial/imperial history, though M5S's was directed at France while VOX's was indirect to Spain's own. In addition, these two parties used history and ties to more culturally similar areas to back up proposals for alternative forms of cooperation: the Hispanic sphere for VOX, and the broader Mediterranean for M5S. Finally, both Podemos and Lega made direct references to Churchill to construct economic and anti-elite arguments. While this comparative analysis does not mention every aspect of the analysis findings, it highlights that despite being from the same national history and context, there were less similarities between parties from the same country as there were for those of the same ideology. Moreover, it demonstrates that patterns were not as clean-cut as expected.

## **5. Conclusion**

Though it has been firmly established that the use of history is a common rhetorical tool in the formation of political arguments, one area in which there is a lack in academic analysis is how it features in the discursive construction of Eurosceptic arguments. Furthermore, while the literature on Euroscepticism is vast with numerous branches of study and debates within it, one aspect that deserves more attention is *how* Eurosceptic parties operationalize Euroscepticism to achieve their goals. As such, this thesis contributes to both sets of literature and further bridges this gap between fields. In addition, it adds to the existing studies focused on this intersection by including a cross-national and cross-ideological comparative element to better understand the influence of ideology and national context on this process.

The political discourse analysis performed on selected speeches and election manifestos revealed that these case studies use history in many of the ways presented in the existing literature to advance Eurosceptic arguments, and the multi-level approach to this analysis allowed for detailed comparisons between cases. Overall, there were more similarities found between parties of the same ideology than those of the same national context. These findings suggest that Eurosceptic parties may be more likely to utilize history in line with their position on the political spectrum than their geographical position when it comes to constructing Eurosceptic arguments. As such, this could also mean that there is nothing inherent about national history that leads to

certain Eurosceptic ideas. Importantly, patterns were not as clean-cut as anticipated, which might indicate that parties have even more agency beyond their national context *and* political ideology than assumed.

However, there are some other factors that could have potentially contributed to this. First, Podemos and VOX are significantly newer parties than Lega and M5S and have garnered much less power in national governments. In addition, there were many internal debates within Spain at the time with the recent Catalan independence referendum and the controversial Law of Historical Memory regarding Franco's legacy in the country. With such polarization and desire to gain power in parliament, it is possible that they stayed truer to ideology and national issues, which might have limited which aspects of history they drew from, and the arguments made regarding Europe. Also, this thesis only analyzed two types of sources from a limited time span for each case, so it is possible that other patterns may be evident elsewhere, such as in different years or other sources.

Despite these alternative possibilities, this thesis at the very least provides insight into patterns regarding the mobilization of history by Eurosceptic parties in general, as well as along ideological and national lines. The research question and methods are applicable to a wide range of cases beyond the ones featured, and thus future research could better determine the generalizability of the analysis findings by using different case studies, additional sources, or a wider range of years.

Overall, it is crucial to continue studying how Eurosceptic parties discursively construct their arguments as it has broader implications for the success of the European project and tensions within the Union. However, the use of history also has implications beyond Euroscepticism and the EU, as it plays a large role in shaping the "frameworks for foreign and domestic policy" more generally (Müller, 2002, p.2). As such, the ways in which history is mobilized affects the entire international system and international relations, and thus future research should continue to strive to understand it.

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