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**CHARACTERISTICS OF EXTREMIST POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES:  
THE CASE OF THE SPANISH FASCIST FRONT BASTION**

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**Abstract**

This work analyses the concept and characteristics of extremist political ideologies through the study of previous works on European and American far-right extremism. This analysis explores how in some societies, like the Spanish one, certain types of extremist political ideologies are tolerated. The author proposes an additional characteristic to the ones analyzed, which helps to classify and understand these ideologies and their sympathizers. This proposed characteristic is based on the use of force to impose an ideology. The case of the Spanish extremist group Bastion Front, of fascist and Francoist ideology, is analyzed through the mentioned characteristics. The discourse given by Isabel Peralta in 2021 in memory of the Blue Division in Madrid is included to demonstrate the tolerance of extremist and fascist public speeches. A review of the main characteristics and values of Spanish national-Catholicism extremist political ideology is presented, as well as those of the historical fascist party Falange, still active today. This work exposes the rhetorical use of Russia by Western fascists as a supposed leader of an illiberal system opposing the American and English order. The author concludes that extremist political ideologies like fascism are tolerated in Spanish society and the Spanish legal system today.

**Keywords:** Blue Division; extremism; fascism; Franco; ideology; national-socialism; Nazism; white supremacy.

The aim of this work is to identify the characteristics of extremist political ideologies – of which fascism is one of them with others like far-right, far-left, ethnic, religious or gender-based supremacy. For this I will refer to the works of Russian and foreign academics on the concept of extremist ideology and political extremism that allow us to understand the concept of extremist political ideologies. Then I review the literature on characteristics of extremist political ideologies to propose an additional characteristic that contributes to reflect more accurately how nowadays political extremists simply decide to ignore other ideological positions to later impose their own by eliminating the others' through assimilation. This is different from being intolerant as these extremists accept the existence of other political ideologies but consider they need to be complemented with theirs to lead the balance of power to their side. The previously described can be seen in Spanish fascism that today might use non-traditional sexual minorities or immigrants from Latin America when they can serve in the fight against Anglo-Saxon liberalism, Muslim immigrants and what they perceive is communism of the left.

This work focuses on Spanish fascism, among the many extremist political ideologies, for two reasons: 1) public expressions in support of fascism in Spain have become normalized with the advent of the far-right party VOX as the third political force in 2019 and with its alliance with the People's Party to govern Madrid in 2021, 2) the active internationalization of Spanish fascism in Europe as presented by VOX in the event VIVA21 organized in October 2021 in Madrid and that had guest speakers from Italy, Hungary and Poland. Though, VOX is not a fascist party, it has some political positions that are fascist like its declared ideological fight against communism and globalism, Spanish ultra-nationalism or the rejection of multinational regional identities of Spain. VOX has been presented by some as the heir of Francoist and Falangist fascism (Rodriguez, 2019), Falange being the historical party that served as an ideological tool for Franco's dictatorship and that today is active in different ways, like forming young Spaniards into their ideology. Though the party Falange Española de las JONS currently has only one seat in Andalusia, its fascist ideology is gaining popularity among the youth, presumably for the perceived inaction of VOX in key

issues like immigration from Muslim majority countries and the need for an even more nationalist political solution.

It is important to stress that fascism is only one of the different types of extremist political ideologies of the far-right, among them are white supremacy, identitarianism, paleoconservatism and white Christian conservatism (Azani et al., 2020: 17–32). The difference between fascism and other extremist political ideologies of the far-right is that the former aims to get total control of the political system through violence, though in some cases it can be done through democratic means, it rejects liberalism and the free market, it has territorial ambitions and proposes a counter-revolution that will defend the interests of the national bourgeois while protecting the workers from the ideals of achieving more equal societies in all social spheres (Agostinone-Wilson, 2020: 34–55). Other extremist ideologies of the far-right do not reject the globalist capitalist economic system they benefit from and are simply xenophobic and identitarian, they are neither interested in reorganizing culture and society as part of a revolutionary process like fascism is. Characteristics of fascist ideology can be identified in Spanish activism in public speeches and written materials, which is the reason I decided to approach this analysis focusing only on fascism as one of the many extremist political ideologies. There are also extremist political ideologies of the far-left but there is no significant political representation of this type of ideologies in the Spanish parliament, and are neither active in the construction of a social base of activists like those of the far-right.

This work assumes the hypothesis that European fascism continues to be politically active and gaining sympathizers while it is being normalized through the falsification of history by society, journalists and some European political systems like the Spanish. In this work I will try to answer the research question: is fascism an extremist political ideology tolerated in Spanish society today? I focus on three tasks to give an answer to the research question: 1) to analyze the characteristics and propositions of the Spanish extremist group Front Bastion, of fascist ideology, published by Spanish media, 2) to analyze the speech given by self-declared fascist activist Isabel Peralta, in February 2021 at a fascist event in Madrid to commemorate the Spanish soldiers of the Blue Division who fought with the Wehrmacht against the Red Army, 3) to examine a piece of the publication *The conquest of the State*, linked to Spanish fascism, where Russia is seen as the leader of an illiberal new order.

### **Characteristics of extremist political ideologies**

Previous works have analyzed the characteristics of American extremists and terrorists of the far-right, far-left and jihadism and have demonstrated there are individual variables that match between sympathizers of these ideologies (Corrado, Davies & Doering, 2020: 6–19). Other works have explored the level of technological skills and how American and European far-right extremists use Internet forums and social media as tools to communicate anonymously, create networks and coordinate attacks (Bolden & Holt, 2014 : 80–89), as well as the posting behavior of American forums users based on pre-existing ideological beliefs that allows to understand their organization capabilities (Chermak, Freilich, Holt, 2019: 3–37). This work is dedicated to the theoretical analysis of proposed characteristics of extremist ideologies that can be political, among others, and of which fascism is one of the many. This analysis can be taken as a reference to understand what characteristics of ideological action Spanish fascism has as an extremist political ideology.

From previous research I have proposed an ideology is a “set of ideas that can either be constructed in the minds of individuals”, it is made up of cognitive concepts as well as emotions that work together to transmit a meaning, and its origin can be 1) natural – through a process of enculturation, it gives individuals the cognitive tools to understand and transform their reality or 2) artificial – through a psychological discursive practice, it is aimed at achieving gains (political, economic, social...) that serve the interests of an elite that creates it (González Cedillo, 2020: 6). Some academics have proposed a classification of ideology based on utopian preferences, which are shaped by the experiences of the individuals that affect their perceptions: ideology is 1) a way of seeing the world – giving attention to some events rather than others and then interpreting them, 2) a way of preferring the world – to desire some functions of the event over others, and 3) a way of acting in the world – to make decisions to act or not based on an event (Manzano-Arredondo, 2017: 2–3). This classification emphasizes the role of natural ideology in understanding the world while sidesteps the relevance of its artificiality in creating perceptions. Artificial ideologies have the capacity, and sometimes the aim, of turning neutral or positive perceptions into negative, false or unrealistic. When this happens, the artificial ideology becomes extremist.

Russian professor K.B. Tolkachev describes extremist ideologies as “a perverted fantastic program for overcoming an acute conflict between the interests of a certain social group and its social opponents”

(Tolkachev, 2012: 59). This approach presents a definition of extremist ideologies that indicates the ideology has been artificially created by the elites of a social group to defeat a competing group threatening the interests of the former. This academic refers to the definition of ideology as a “political, legal, religious, ethnic, esthetic or philosophical view” that allows us to understand his analysis of extremist ideologies can refer to political ideologies from the right – center – left spectrum (Tolkachev, 2012: 58).

In their work, S. Chermak, J. Freilich and A. Kerodal mention extremist beliefs or ideologies are “political ideas that are diametrically opposed to society’s core values” (Kerodala, Freilich & Chermak, 2016: 687–688). This lets us know that, according to these academics, extremist ideologies are always political because they depart from socially accepted values that position the individual in a certain category of the right – center – left spectrum. Through their work, these academics have identified the different beliefs of the American far-right extremist ideology that include xenophobia, conspiracy theories, anti-government, anti-tax, anti-gun controls, but also the different types of this American extremist political ideology like the Ku Klux Klan, Christian Identity and Neo-Nazis (Kerodala, Freilich & Chermak, 2016: 690–693).

Others like A. Krouwel and J. van Prooijen define political extremism as “the extent to which regular citizens are polarized into, and strongly identify with, generic left or right-wing ideological outlooks on society” (Krouwel & van Prooijen, 2019: 1). These academics identify the core of society’s values as the center of the political spectrum and any ideological position diverting extremely to the left or right is the expression of the extremist political ideology. They propose the ideological polarization depends on a psychological process that will make the individual move in any of the two directions from the center shaping the level of ideological consistency and thus, extremism.

From the presented definitions of political extremism and extremist ideology it can be determined that political extremism refers to the political ideologies from the political spectrum that individuals can be polarized into, and that extremist ideology is any type of social view that can be political but is not limited to it. An extremist political ideology can be of the left or right and requires an extreme departure from the center of socially accepted values. An extremist political ideology can be artificially created by groups of interests and the polarization of the individuals will involve a psychological process. In this case, Spanish fascism is an extremist political ideology of the extreme right that is being spread by politicians and activists interested in gaining political power to stop what they consider is the transformation of Spain into a communist regime dominated by multiculturalism, feminism and sexual minorities.

Extremist ideologies, including political ideologies, have different characteristics, K.B. Tolkachev has proposed six: 1) promote ideas of racial, social or national inequality where some have rights and others do not, 2) divide society in a bipolar system of the good and the evil, 3) criticize the existing social order when it benefits other social groups, 4) promote a social program to defend the extremist group and its interests, 5) simplify ideas, goals and tasks about their dogmas, 6) allow physical violence and destruction of political enemies and institutions (Tolkachev, 2012: 59–60). Simplification of ideas, polarization and the destruction of *the other* through violence are indeed some observable characteristics of extremist political ideologies but more recently it could be observed that Spanish fascists have integrated immigrants of Hispanic background and sexual minorities into their nationalist discourse, groups that are considered political enemies of Spanish fascism (Pero la luz sigue subiendo y nadie dice nada, 2021).

Russian senior lecturer V.A. Gauzhaeva considers extremist ideologies like Nazism or fascism have four characteristics as: 1) accusing society or the State of committing violence against the extremist, 2) justifying the need for violence to achieve political goals, 3) ideologizing their followers, 4) using and implementing tasks that commit sympathizers to the ideology (Gauzhaeva, 2016: 53–55). The exchange of accusations between the State – that delimits who is an extremist as per its laws – and the extremist that may lead to the use of violence by both parties, as well as the use of ideology to ensure loyalty among sympathizers are also characteristics of extremist political ideologies, as proposed by this academic, but still cannot describe the integration of some political enemies into Spanish fascism today.

Finally, A. Krouwel and J. van Prooijen propose four psychological features of political (ideological) extremism: 1) psychological distress – stresses the search of meaningful life purposes, 2) cognitive simplicity – presents a reductionist perception of the world, 3) overconfidence – belief of superiority in their overconfident simplifications of the world, 4) intolerance – inferiorization of other groups and opinions (Krouwel & van Prooijen, 2019: 2–4). The first three characteristics lead the individual to create an ideological consistency that will only validate the own accepted ideological Truth, and according to these academics, will make the individual intolerant to other ideological positions.

The intolerant does not want *the other* to exist and avoids any interaction, but as explored previously, Spanish fascism has incorporated some of its political enemies to their fight against communism stepping

over their traditional intolerance. This is the reason I consider an additional characteristic can be proposed for extremist political ideologies: 1) the forced acceptance of the perceived Truth on *the other*. This characteristic could explain the elimination of competing ideologies by non-violent means like propaganda on social media or political discourses to force *the other* to accept they must join the fight of the extremist to avoid the worst of two evils. In their fight against socialist policies shaped by feminism and pro-immigration of the government, Spanish fascists have presented these very policies as dangerous for women, sexual minorities and Latin American immigrants as they supposedly welcome Muslim immigrants capable of attacking the first two groups. The third group is forced to accept the Truth of Spanish fascists by presenting socialist policies as pure communism like the Cuban or Venezuelan systems, known to Latin Americans. Spanish fascism then presents a model in which gender equality, sexual identities and immigrants can exist but whose ideologies must be complemented within fascism to secure the existence of order.

### **Spanish fascist activism today**

There is a good amount of works that describe the characteristics of extremist political ideologies in Europe, especially German, Italian and Spanish fascism. Among some of these works, Russian academics have analyzed the origins, differences and characteristics of these three types of fascism (Derevjanko, 2016: 43–46, Koval', 2013: 83–85, Nastusevich, 2020: 107), while other foreign contributions on Italian fascism allow us to understand its proposition as a “third way” solution to the crisis of capitalism, apart from capitalism and communism (Nel'e, 2010: 115–117). One of the definitions of fascism describes the ideology as “the most reactionary type of capitalism that uses the cruelest forms of slavery of men” that is founded on the desire of “the conformist workers to receive crumbs from the employers, at the time workers of other ethnicities are enslaved” (Buzgalin, 2020: 109–111), which emphasizes the classist and racist character of the bourgeois elites that employ this ideology to convince workers the threats of socialist or communist policies to their interests are also a threat to those of the workers. German, Italian and Spanish fascism were the reaction to the advance of Communism in Europe that created corporatist States to protect the economic interests of the elites while preventing proletarian revolutions. The enemies of fascism were Marxists, Communists, liberals, democrats, and Jews.

The fascist regime of Spain lasted from 1939 to 1975, known as Francoism, and whose leader was Francisco Franco. The central ideology of Francoism was national – Catholicism, in theory, it promoted the politicized concept of Hispanidad or the unity of previous Spanish colonial territories under a common shared identity under the power of Madrid and the Catholic Church (Koval', 2013: 83–85). Spanish nationalist – Catholics believed they have been chosen by God to christianize the world, that their religious values should define culture, social life and politics, and some were ready to die for the Church and the nation (Nastusevich, 2020: 107). The ideology of national – Catholicism is still alive today in Spain and shares similarities with other religious extremist ideologies like that of American far-right Evangelicals or Christianists (Gonzalez Cedillo, 2019: 97–98). National – Catholicism is still today anti-republican, anticommunist and monarchist. The fascist political parties Falange (still active today after being refounded in 1999) and JONS considered the multi-ethnicity of Spain would lead to separatism so the solution was to destroy the party system, fight the leftist revolutionary movements, and create a totalitarian regime to promote national unity so they gave their support to Franco (Konjaev, 2013: 50).

In his fight against Spanish republicanism in the Civil war, Franco requested military help from Mussolini and Hitler which he received in 1936. Continuous requests from Franco increased the Spanish debt to the Reich which demanded commitment, so in 1941 Francoist regime sent the Blue Division to the East front (Orehova, 2014: 107). The battalion had initially over 20,000 volunteers which doubled by 1943, they participated in battles against the Red Army in Novgorod, Krasny Bor and the siege of Leningrad. The Division was made mostly of Spaniards who supported Franco's fascist regime and saw the opportunity to continue the fight against communism they started in the Civil War, though there were also “white” Russian emigrants who joined the Division to avenge their defeat in the Revolution and to “liberate” Russia from communism (Koval'ov, 2013: 105–108).

Franco's fascist regime ended but its sympathizers are still numerous in Spain and continue to identify as anticommunist, fascist, nationalist – Catholics who defend the traditional family and family values, oppose feminist ideology and the rights of non-traditional sexual minorities. These nationalist – Catholics also oppose immigration from non-Christian non-European countries, for some immigration from Latin America is tolerated based on the ideology of Hispanidad.

The Bastion Front is a fascist group created during the pandemic in Madrid in May 2020, its members are between fifteen to thirty years old, it is claimed it has around 100 members, has local representation in Sevilla and Extremadura, its members oppose the acceptance and settlement of unaccompanied migrant minors from North Africa (whom they falsely accuse of raping Spanish women); the group joined other extremists in a hunt for minor migrants in Madrid in 2020 (Casal, 2021). Isabel Peralta, of eighteen years old, is one of the members of the Bastion Front, in the event in memory of the battle of Krasny Bor and the Blue Division in February 13<sup>th</sup> 2021, at the Almudena cemetery in Madrid, organized by neo-Nazi groups and the historical fascist party Falange, I. Peralta gave the following speech: «It is our supreme obligation to fight for Spain, to fight for Europe, now weak and liquidated by the enemy. The enemy will always be the same, although with different masks: the Jew. Because nothing is more certain than this statement. The Jew is the culprit and the Blue Division fought for it» (Téllez, 2021).

I. Peralta is a self-declared fascist, racist, sympathizer of Falange and a national-socialist who “fell in love with fascism” at the age of thirteen, she is the daughter of a Spanish right-wing politician (Téllez, 2021). The Falange party was founded in 1934 as Falange Española de las JONS and supported Franco’s regime, it was refounded in 1976 as Falange Española de las JONS, then in 1999 it split into two: La Falange and FE-JONS. On their website, Falange claims the Soviet Union tried to “sovietize” the second Spanish Republic, the burning of churches, robberies, strikes, and murders of falanagists were carried out by socialists and radical leftists after the 1936 elections where the Popular Front party won – party dominated by radicals from the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) and the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) (*Historia*, Falange). The party claims the leader of La Falange Española Jose Antonio Primo offered to mediate between the left and the right fighting in the Civil War, then gave its support to the right, but was later used by Franco to achieve his political goals (*Historia*, Falange). The values of the party today are anti-capitalism, social conservatism, Spanish nationalism, national-syndicalism, opposition to the recognition of the Spanish multi-ethnicity as it might lead to separatism, international Hispanidad to counter Anglo-Saxon dominance, anti-monarchical, Catholicity, anti-immigration (mostly of non-Hispanics), among others (*Historia*, Falange).

The above mentioned ideological values of Falange meet the first five characteristics of extremist political ideologies proposed by K.B. Tolkachev, as Falange proposes people can be prioritized based on Spanish ethnic and historical characteristics; capitalists and socialists, are on the “evil” side; criticizes the social order in Spain that benefits the autonomous regions and minorities; proposes its own program to defend its extremist interests and simplifies its propositions and ideas of a historic Spain that is very unlikely to become as powerful and influential as it once was. Of the characteristics proposed by V.A. Gauzhaeva Falange meets the first three as in its description accuses the Republican government of murdering its sympathizers in the 30’s and justify the reactionary response while today ideologizes its followers through discourses and events like the one mentioned at the Almudena cemetery. Of the features proposed by A. Krouwel and J. van Prooijen, Falange meets all four as it stresses that only through its program Spaniards will give Spain a secured existence threaten today by different factors; it reduces the complexity of political issues to a confrontation against the Jews, communists, socialists, the left; based on this simplification they believe their “third option” is superior to the right and the left, and are intolerant to other political ideologies, especially against socialism.

The ideological positions of Falange also match the proposed characteristic in this work as they recognize the existence of an all-Spanish identity and culture, as well as sexual minorities and immigration that its ideologues force onto *the others* with the intention to complement them and gain power through them. Bastion Front and their leader I. Peralta are intolerant towards Muslim immigrants specially, but sources do not mention much about their level of acceptance of Hispanic immigrants though their major preoccupation is the loss of Spanish culture – which may include Latin American immigrants. Bastion Front and I. Peralta as sympathizers of Falange follow the same ideological positions of the party.

### Conclusion

Based on the description of the ideology of Bastion Front, it can be concluded that this is a group that holds the extremist political ideology of Falangist fascism. As a reminder of Mussolini’s fascists and their methods of political intimidation, the Bastion Front intercepted Pablo Iglesias in March 2021 when he was campaigning in Madrid. Events like this demonstrate the Bastion Front is more of a hit group of the far-right than a political organization. The Bastion Front is an extremist political ideological group of young national-socialist Spaniards who participate in events organized together with other local fascist groups, some of its members share the extremist political ideology of the fascist party Falange – a historical tool used

by Franco to make his dictatorship work. I. Peralta, as a member and the public face of Bastion Front, holds to the same extremist political ideology of the group and is a self-declared fascist. On the same week I. Peralta praised fascism publicly, Pablo Hasel, a Catalan communist activist and rap singer, was taken to prison for his songs that criticize the eccentricities, corruption and usefulness of the Spanish royal family.

Some Spanish media have written about the Blue Division as heroic, regardless of having fought for the Wehrmacht and the Nazi regime (Cervera, 2015). This could be contributing to the positive perception of the Francoist fascist regime. Exalting the role of the Blue Division as I. Peralta did through the falsification of history sums to the contribution of media. The ideology of National-Catholicism is a tool of Spanish fascism of Falange, though some of its core ideas contradict each other - Falange is anti-monarchist, National-Catholicism not. However, National-Catholicism seems to impose over anti-monarchical Falangist national-socialism among far-right Spanish groups that still today consider they are in a global fight against international communism. This work evidences how in the Spanish legal system anti-monarchical discourse is punishable while exalting fascism and ethnic supremacy can be tolerated and considered a political alternative that can be voted in democratic elections.

The characteristics of extremist political ideologies presented in this work can serve as a tool to understand how these ideologies act to achieve their aim of political gains through manipulation. In the struggle for power some extremists have adapted their discourse to include individuals with some ideological differences but who can find middle positions in the political proposition of extremists that make them feel protected. This adaptation has been observed in Spanish fascism and the far-right, but is not limited to these ideological groups or society and more research of different groups and geographies is recommended.

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## **ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ ЭКСТРЕМИСТСКИХ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ ИДЕОЛОГИЙ: СЛУЧАЙ ИСПАНСКОГО ПЕРЕДНЕГО БАСТИОНА**

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### **Аннотация**

Анализируются понятие и характеристики экстремистских политических идеологий на основе изучения предыдущих работ о европейском и американском крайне правом экстремизме, а также соответствующих определений. Данный анализ показывает, как некоторые общества, например, испанское, терпимы к некоторым типам экстремистских политических идеологий. Автор предлагает дополнительную характеристику экстремистских политических идеологий, которая помогает классифицировать и понимать эти идеологии и их сторонников. Предлагаемая характеристика основана на применении силы с целью навязать определенную идеологию. Пример испанской экстремистской группировки Бастион Фронт, фашистской и франкистской идеологии, анализируется по указанным характеристикам. Анализ дискурса, произнесенный Изабель Перальта в 2021 г., в память о Голубой дивизии в Мадриде, включается, с целью продемонстрировать терпимость к публичным выступлениям экстремистов и фашистов в Испании. Часть публикации «Завоевание государства», связанная с И. Перальтой и Бастионным фронтом, также анализируется с целью разоблачения их политической экстремистской идеологии. Представляется обзор основных характеристик и ценностей экстремистской политической идеологии испанского национал-католицизма, а также исторической фашистской партии Фаланга, действующей до сегодняшнего дня. Данная работа разоблачает риторическое использование России западными фашистами в качестве предполагаемого лидера нелиберальной системы, противостоящей американскому и английскому порядку. Автор приходит к выводу, что экстремистские политические идеологии, такие как фашизм, терпимы в современном испанском обществе и в данной правовой системе.

**Ключевые слова:** Голубая дивизия; экстремизм; фашизм; Франко; идеология; национал-социализм; нацизм; белый супремасизм.