Rally 'round the barrack: Far-right support and the military

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Abstract

Literature on the determinants of far-right support has increased markedly during the last few years, expanding our knowledge on who votes for these parties. However, given the importance of nationalism and authoritarianism in their discourse, it is surprising that little is known about the relationship between the military and voting for the far-right. Recent scandals involving military personnel and far-right terror plots in the US, Germany, and other developed democracies underscore this gap. In this paper, we argue that, given shared values over nationalism and authoritarianism, there is an ideological affinity between the military and far-right parties. We use two distinct empirical strategies to test this argument leveraging both individual and local-level data from Spain. First, compiling a catalogue of cross-sectional surveys to create a large dataset with identifiable military personnel, we show that individual military personnel are significantly more prone to support Spain's new populist radical right-wing party, VOX. Second, we show that the location of military facilities across Spain is linked to higher localised support for VOX. Finally, and leveraging spatial regression models, we also provide strong evidence of spatial diffusion with the presence of military facilities engendering localised spillover effects. Our findings are relevant to both the literature on far-right support and our knowledge of civil-military relationships.

Keywords: authoritarianism, military, far-right parties, spatial analysis, VOX

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Introduction

The increasing electoral success of both radical right and extreme right parties has become a topic of intense public and academic discussion (Mudde, 2019). A burgeoning body of research examines the causes of far-right electoral support (Im et al., 2019; Abou-Chadi & Kurer, 2021; Carella & Ford, 2020; Kurer, 2020; Spierings, 2021), as well as the consequences of their political successes (Bale, 2003; Han, 2015; Abou-Chadi, 2016; Abou-Chadi & Krause, 2018; Bischof & Wagner, 2019). Among the findings that emerge from this catalogue of research, we know that support for the far-right is higher among individuals who harbor authoritarian (Donovan, 2019) or anti-immigration attitudes (Ivarsflaten, 2008; Rooduijn, 2018; Zhirkov, 2014). This is not surprising, since far-right parties have long been defined by their core principles of nativism (combination of nationalism and xenophobia) and authoritarianism (Mudde, 2007).

Nationalism and principles of authority are also a core tenet of military institutions, present in both professional socialization and institutional symbols (Cafario & Martínez, 2005). Given these shared values, it is striking that there is no research exploring the link between the armed forces and the far-right, particularly, probing whether members of the armed forces are more sympathetic to the far-right or whether the presence of military symbols has any influence in mobilizing far-right support.

Indeed, recent reports have raised attention to the threat of far-right presence within military ranks in Western democracies (Simi, Bubolz & Hardman, 2013; Belew, 2018; Koehler, 2019; Kaufman & Liebermann, 2021), underscoring the relevance of such a link. A notorious case of extremism turned violent is Timothy McVeigh, the perpetrator of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, who was a decorated US Army veteran of the Gulf War. But the risk that far-right presence within the military entails is not limited to high-profile, but rare, cases of terrorism. In 2017, for instance, the German *Bundeswehr* was involved in a scandal involving a plot by far-right soldiers to attack asylum seekers and left-wing politicians (Eddy, 2017). In the US, around one fifth of the individuals charged in relation to the attack on the US Capitol in January 2021 were active in the US armed forces (Horton, 2021). Beyond isolated cases of political

violence, there is also anecdotal evidence of a more generalized right wing ideology among the military (Laabs, 2021). In recent years, some reports point to an increase of far-right ideas in the military in the US (Shane, 2020) and Germany (Flade, 2021; BdV, 2020). A recent investigation found that German police forces have recorded hundreds of suspected incidents of right-wing extremism among police officers (Bartsch et al., 2020). In Austria, the veterans' organizations that play an important role in most Austrian villages and towns have historically been carriers of a "soft right-wing extremism" (Art, 2011, 117). In France, a group of military servicemen, including several retired generals, recently published a letter in a right-wing magazine denouncing what they saw as concessions to Islamism by the Macron government and warning of the risk of a 'racial war' (BBC, 2021). The publication date, April 21, 2021, marked the 60th anniversary of the Algiers putsch, a failed *coup d'état* by retired army generals who opposed the independence of colonial Algeria.

In Spain, the country's new far-right party, VOX, was involved in related scandals implicating the military. In late November 2020, a group of retired generals addressed a letter to King Felipe VI—Spain's Head of State—denouncing the current "social-communist" government, which was followed by a longer manifesto in which military officers endorsed VOX and replicated the party's primary talking points (Wilkinson, 2020). Shortly afterwards, a WhatsApp group chat was discovered in which some of the letter signers, retired air force generals, talked of "executing 26 million bitches," referring to left-wing and non-Spanish nationalist voters.¹

Despite these numerous incidents, there is, to the best of our knowledge, no quantitative empirical evidence on the link between the military and the far-right. This gap is striking for two main reasons. First, theoretically, there is an ideological affinity between the two groups, as both underscore the principles of authority and nationalism, and usually above-average preferences for mores stringent, and enforceable, internal security policies.

¹Territorial divisions are a salient political cleavage in Spanish politics and played a role in VOX's political ascendancy in 2018 (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019).

And second, this question has policy-based relevance. Members of the armed forces receive military training and have access to firearms, which can exacerbate the risks of ideological extremism. Moreover, the presence of extremists within the military, even if it only affects a minority within the institution, can complicate civil-military relationships in any democracy.

In this paper, we posit two theoretical claims. First, we argue that military socialization, as a hub of occupationally cemented political preferences (Kirschelt & Rehm, 2014), makes members of the armed forces more likely to support the far-right. The values shared by both groups suggest there is a “organizational and cultural overlap between the military” and the far-right (Simi, Bubolz & Hardman, 2013) that would justify ideological affinities. Second, we theorise that the presence of military hubs in localised areas engenders a diffusion effect increasing local far-right support based on individuals’ spatial propinquity to military personnel and the nationalistic symbolism concentrated around military locations. Everyday contact with military personnel and the presence of military symbols should help mobilize far-right support in local areas, particularly among those that are more sympathetic to rightist parties.

We test these arguments using data from Spain. First, we use survey data, pooling together over 50,000 respondents over sixteen different waves of Spain’s monthly sociological barometer to create a well-powered sample that allows us to compare voting and ideological preferences between individuals in the armed forces and civilians. Second, we geocode the location of Spanish Armed Forces’ facilities and match them with electoral results at the census tract-level. Using both linear and spatial models, we analyze whether census tracts with military facilities show higher electoral support for the far-right and whether there is evidence of spatial contagion effects based on spatial propinquity to these facilities. The results support our argument. We find that members of the armed forces are more likely to vote for VOX than average. The increased affinity between armed forces personnel and the far-right is present even amongst those individuals with symmetrical ideological preferences suggesting that military participation socializes a penchant for the far-right above ideological congru-

ence. We also find that support for VOX is higher in census tracts which host military facilities, and show evidence of spatial diffusion to neighboring census tracts. Supporting the idea that the military also mobilize support among the surrounding population, we find that spatial diffusion mainly takes place in high-income areas that are, arguably, more likely to be mobilized by military presence.

This paper makes two main contributions to the literature. First, our findings speak to the growing literature that explains support for the far-right. And second, we contribute to previous research on the risk of violent extremism and civil-military relationships. Given the relevance of these issues around the globe, our findings thus travel well beyond Spanish case and inform the global rise of far-right movements.

The recent increase of the far-right

The persistent incremental electoral success of far-right parties has become a topic of increasingly salient public debate and academic discussion. Both pundits and scholars highlight the potential threat of far-right parties to liberal democracy ([Rama & Casal Bértoa, 2020](#); [Spittler, 2018](#)). Far-right party success is not without political consequences. A wide catalogue of literature highlights the influential role of the success of this set of parties. [Abou-Chadi & Krause \(2018\)](#), for example, provide robust causal evidence that demonstrates that the entry of radical right-wing parties in parliament has a significant contagion effect on mainstream parties' policy positions with parties on the centre right accommodating the more authoritarian (typically anti-immigration) policies that form the canon of far-right manifestos.² The causal impact of far-right gains on mainstream parties has found empirical support via observational work relying on both quantitative ([Abou-Chadi, 2016](#); [Han, 2015](#)) as well as qualitative ([Bale, 2003](#)) approaches. Beyond the behaviour of political parties, the successes of far-right parties demonstrated by [Abou-Chadi & Krause \(2018\)](#) have also been shown to engender changes in the attitudes and behaviour of voters. Relying

²Of note is that [Abou-Chadi & Wagner \(2020\)](#) demonstrate that such accommodating strategies, when taken by centre-left parties, provide limited benefits and, as shown by [Krause, Cohen & Abou-Chadi \(2019\)](#) can also have regressive effects for centre-right parties.

on quasi-experimental evidence from the Netherlands and cross-national longitudinal data from Europe, [Bischof & Wagner \(2019\)](#) demonstrate that radical-right party electoral victories can augment levels of voter polarisation by simultaneously causing a backlash and legitimisation effect amongst voters. Given the implications of far-right party success, understanding the determinants that predict what drives support for these parties is of paramount importance.

In response to the rise of far-right parties, including radical right-wing and extreme rights parties,³ a burgeoning literature has emerged that provides a thick description of the determining factors that explain the far-right's progressive electoral ascendancy across different party systems. We know, for example, that individuals, and households ([Abou-Chadi & Kurer, 2021](#)), subjected to increased labour market risk are more inclined to support radical right parties ([Kurer, 2020](#); [Im et al., 2019](#)), as too are individuals in "low prestige" occupations ([Carella & Ford, 2020](#)) or belong to 'blue-collar' professions ([Zhirkov, 2014](#)) and the working class ([Oesch, 2008](#)). Women and sexual minority voters are less prone to vote for far-right parties ([Spierings & Zaslove, 2015](#); [Spierings, 2021](#)) given that they tend to be less supportive of the nativist anti-immigrant policy agenda ([Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020](#); [Spierings & Zaslove, 2015](#)) that forms a central tenant of far-right parties' ideological and rhetorical toolkit. Finally, several comparative studies in both European and non-European states provide clear empirical evidence that authoritarian values, nativist tendencies and anti-immigrant preferences play a significant and substantive role when it comes to understanding far-right party success ([Art, 2011](#); [Kitschelt, 1995](#); [Lubbers, Gijsberts & Scheepers, 2002](#); [Betz, 1994](#)).

³[Mudde \(2019\)](#) penned that the far-right family encompass both, radical and extreme right parties. While the former are against the liberal component of democracy (minority rights and political pluralism), the latter is against democracy *per se*. Only radical-right parties, which core ideology is nativism could be populist. In the case of VOX, the existing literature defines the party as a populist radical right-wing party ([Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019](#); [Norris, 2020](#)). It is worth noting, however, that whilst the party belongs to the *radical* cohort of the far-right family, there are substantive sections within the party's electoral constituency who hold anti-democratic *extreme right* preferences ([Rama et al., 2021](#)).

Far-right parties and the military

We argue that the relationship between the military and far-right support should be found along two dimensions: increased far-right support among individuals who belong to the armed forces and a diffusion effect that makes civilians close to military facilities more likely to support the far-right.

Support within the armed forces

There are at least two theoretical mechanisms that explain increased support for the far-right among members of the armed forces. First, we argue that there is an 'elective affinity' between the armed forces and far-right parties that makes members of the former more likely to vote for these parties ([Simi, Bubolz & Hardman, 2013](#)). The core of this argument is that both far-right parties and the military have strong preferences for an authoritarian approach to public security and a strong version of nationalism.

Far-right parties are characterized by authoritarianism and nativism. Nativism, a concept closely related to ethno-nationalism, advocates the idea that "states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements [...] are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state" ([Mudde, 2007](#), 19). Authoritarianism is defined as "the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely" ([Mudde, 2007](#), 19). Authoritarian values are usually linked to preferences for stricter "law and order" measures, such as larger law enforcement bodies with greater competencies and less judicial oversight, as well as tougher sentences for criminals and limitations on social behaviour that deviates from the social norms of an "orderly" society ([Mudde, 2016](#); [Mudde & Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2017](#)).

On the part of the military, these same values are usually part of the initial socialization when individuals become part of the armed forces ([Cafario & Martínez, 2005](#)). [Cafario \(1998\)](#), analysing military cadets from nine European countries, finds that, "serving my nation", "working in a disciplined organization" and "emulating

military personality” are among the most prominent self-reported motivations behind self-selection into the military. In advance of occupational socialisation, there is, therefore, already evidence of authoritarian symmetries between military recruits and the values associated with the armed forces. [Kirschelt & Rehm \(2014\)](#) pen these self-selection mechanisms the “weak” link between occupations and political preferences.⁴ Over and above self-selection into occupations, [Kirschelt & Rehm \(2014\)](#) maintain that occupations can engender a distinct political consciousness as “occupational experience itself nurtures and reinforces political attitudes” (p.1678).

Given this theoretical starting point, we posit that lived occupational experience in the armed forces engenders a socialisation effect that instills and consolidates increased political support for the far-right. This argument builds on sociology which demonstrates that, in a context where the daily lives of individuals in industrialised society are dominated by work, occupational activities, independent of pre-occupation characteristics, influence and shape individuals’ psychological dispositions as well as the political values ([Kohn, 2001](#)). Occupational activities and daily interactions with work-based value structures can engender occupationally acquired priorities ([Kirschelt & Rehm, 2014](#)), form distinct modes of reasoning ([Kohn, 2001](#)), and alter personality traits ([Kohn & Schooler, 1983](#)) that are then applied and adopted in non-professional aspects of an individual’s life. In private sector organisations, for example, individuals in hierarchical positions where professional priorities focus on subordinate supervisions and resource allocation, evidence points towards participation in these roles driving individuals towards authoritarian values that place a premium on uniformity, obedience and respect for authority ([Kirschelt & Rehm, 2014](#)). Our proposition is that in light of the armed forces’ penchant for the nationalist authoritarianism, which as we detail above are symmetric priorities to those advocated by parties on the far-

⁴Refuting the case for self-selection, [Kirschelt & Rehm \(2014\)](#) highlight that labour market supply often does not permit individuals who work in areas that coalesce with their values and it is more likely the case that work in certain sectors shapes values. Employment options for individuals are shaped by a variety of factors that limit self-selection including supply side factors (job market size, geography, and (competitive) selection processes) as well as demand side factors (human capital, income ambitions, competence).

right, then participation in the armed forces will likely engender increased political sympathies with far-right parties.

Second, the connection between military personnel and far-right parties is also influenced by the occupational interests of the members of armed forces. Prioritizing public security and supporting the enlargement of law enforcement and defense bodies also benefits the material interests of individuals who form part of these institutions (Betz, 1994). Political gains for the far-right are likely to result in the consolidation of occupational prestige among for the armed forces.

This relationship is particularly visible in some Latin American countries, such as Brazil. Far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, who is a former Army Captain himself, has empowered military and former military personnel by filling his posts with seasoned military men over civilian political leaders. As a result, military personnel have a strong presence across many government agencies or ministries and “not only occupied important first echelon posts but also controlled second and third echelon positions in the state machinery” (Nobre, 2020, 167). Similar patterns were observed during the 2016-2020 Trump presidency. Trump, penned by both Mudde & Rovira-Kaltwasser (2017) as an example of mainstreaming of the far-right, filled his cabinet with military generals. Whilst the presence of leaders with military experience is not uncommon, Trump’s inner circle was the most populated military-heavy cabinet.

Despite these theoretical arguments, the empirical evidence exposing military-civilian divergence in support for the far-right is extremely limited. Relying on localised data from France in the late 1980s, Mayer & Perrineua (1989) showed that Le Pen’s *Front national* enjoyed a particularly high level of electoral success in one district in Grenoble, where the presence of police barracks accounted for about one third of the locally registered electorate. To the best of our knowledge, however, there is no robust individual-level evidence that military personnel harbour distinct partisan preferences than civilians nor regarding their potential to sympathise with the far-right.

Our first two hypotheses build on this discussion. Our expectation is that military personnel will be more inclined to vote for the far-right. Leveraging both individual and local level data, we hypothesise:

H1 Members of the military forces will be more likely to support far-right parties.

H2 Census sections that are home to military facilities will report higher levels of electoral support for far-right parties.

Diffusion effects

There are reason to think that the link between the military and far-right parties is not limited to the military personnel. In particular, we argue that civilians living in areas with a high concentration of military forces will also be more likely to support far-right parties. In other words, the presence of the military helps to mobilize far-right support, at least among individuals who were more sympathetic to rightist parties in the first place.

First, a higher number of military personnel means a higher likelihood of personal contact in everyday interactions, transforming the local social context. According to contextual theories of political preferences, individuals' ideological beliefs and partisan attachments are strongly shaped by social interaction ([Huckfeldt, Plutzer & Sprague, 1993](#)). In a classic work, [Putnam \(1966\)](#) highlights the role social interactions within local communities play in determining individual electoral preferences. A large part of these processes is the diffusion of political information through local social networks ([Baybeck & Huckfeldt, 2002](#)). More recent research highlights that localised neighbourhood-level interactions are key to understand the influence of the social context on individuals' preferences ([Enos, 2017](#)). Empirical evidence on voting behavior supports this idea. We know, for example, that individuals factor in their neighbour's opinion of them when deciding their vote ([Rolfe, 2002](#)) and that voter mobilisation efforts can have spillover effects in neighbouring households ([Foos et al., 2021](#)).

Thus, we argue that the influence of military presence on support for far-right parties should be a function of spatial proximity. Being close to military facilities results in more frequent interactions between civilians and military personnel living in those areas and this inter-group exposure has the potential to influence political preferences (Latané, 1981, 1996).

Second, the simple presence of military facilities should act as a mobilization device, even without direct, personal interactions. Military facilities have a strong symbolic component, heavily influenced by nationalist and patriotic feelings. Even if the political meaning of nationalist symbols is not the same across different countries, we expect that these displays should make individuals more likely to see far-right parties' nationalist discourse in a positive way. Research on political attitudes supports the idea that inter-group contact can change political attitudes, even if it does not entail frequent personal interactions (Allport, 1954). For example, Gravelle (2014) finds a positive correlation between proximity to the US border and positive views of the US among Canadian citizens. In Europe, Diez Medrano (2003) finds that proximity to a cross-national border with another EU member states positively influences preferences in favour of European integration. We argue the presence of military facilities nearby makes individuals more likely to support far-right parties, because of both the effect of everyday interactions with military personnel and the symbolic influence of military presence. This diffusion effect, however, should be somewhat mediated by other factors that explain far-right support. In other words, the mobilizing effect of military presence should take place mostly among individuals who are relatively predisposed to support right-wing parties. For individuals who are on the other side of the ideological spectrum, the presence of the military or nationalist displays could have a negative (backlash) effect. Indeed, contact theory states that inter-group contact is not universally positive, but rather is often conditioned by threat perception. In those situations where contact takes place where an out-group is perceived as threatening, contact can have negative effects (Stephan et al., 2002; Stephan, Ybarra & Morrison, 2009).

Our final hypotheses are based on our theoretical case for spatial diffusion effects:

H3 Electoral support for far-right parties will be higher in census sections spatially close to military facilities.

H4 The diffusion effect of military presence will be stronger in areas more predisposed to support far-right parties.

Empirical strategy

We use a two-level empirical strategy to test the argument developed above, using data from Spain. First, we use survey data to test whether members of the armed forces are more likely to vote for the far-right party VOX. Second, we exploit census section-level data to test whether electoral support for VOX is higher in census sections that host military facilities and whether there is evidence of spatial contagion beyond the immediate confines of these sections. This double-level approach allows us to overcome the limitations of relying only on individual-level or local-level data, overcoming potential concerns regarding survey under-reporting or ecological biases.

Individual-level evidence

We use individual-level survey data, pooling together sixteen different waves of Spain's monthly sociological survey,⁵ to assess the role of military association with support for the far-right in Spain, in order to test **H1**. Our final dataset includes 58,545 respondents in a representative sample of the Spanish population from November 2019 to April 2021.

Variables

Data on the electoral support for the far-right in Spain relies on individuals' self-reported voting intentions for VOX or individuals' retrospective vote choice in the

⁵Spain's monthly barometer and the country's national election studies are fielded by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (CIS).

case of the post-electoral wave of the survey in December 2019. The dependent variable is a binary indicator of support for VOX.

In each wave of the Spain's monthly barometer, individuals are asked to report their occupation. We build a binary indicator, coding as military personnel those individuals who identify their occupation in the military or in the armed forces. Around 1% ($n = 591$) of the sample identify as members of the armed forces. Although this proportion is small relative to the total population, the stratified sample facilitates a sufficient number of observations to have enough power to identify differences in voting preferences between the two groups.

We run logistic models on support for VOX, including fixed effects for individual barometer waves⁶ and municipal fixed effects. Including municipal fixed effects controls for any unobserved municipality-specific heterogeneity that might exhibit a deterministic effect on far-right support such as local economic factors (Bolet, 2021; Georgiadou, Rori & Roumanias, 2018), ethnic diversity (Iglesias-Pascual, Paloma & Benitez, 2021), or other potential confounders such as historical legacies associated with the pre-democratic past that may influence contemporary outcomes (Hoerner, Jaax & Rodon, 2019; Villamil & Balcells, 2021). In addition, we also cluster standard errors by each barometer wave.

We also include a vector of control variables, namely: gender, age, education level, employment status and whether someone reports being religious, all of which have been found to have important determining effects on support for VOX (Rama et al., 2021). In some of the models we also include a 10-point measure of ideological placement between the left (1) and right (10). Importantly, whilst in other European polities left vs right (economic) preferences and liberal vs authoritarian (socio-cultural) preferences have been demonstrated to be independent (Bakker, Jolly & Polk, 2012; Lefkofridi, Wagner & Willmann, 2014), in Spain this is not the case. In addition to Spain's centre-periphery conflict—a core determinant of VOX's electoral rise (Turnbull-

⁶One concern of relying on cumulative iterations of cross-sectional surveys is that temporal variation across the different waves may bias estimates. We test for this in the Appendix (see Figure A2) and show that, while support for VOX has increased over time, there is no similar temporal variation in the differences between military and non-military personnel.

Dugarte, 2019)—both voters and parties coalesce around a single left-liberal vs right-authoritarian axis (Sánchez-Cuenca & Dinas, 2012). The variable measuring ideology is, therefore, indicative of voters’ placement in this unidimensional space.

Support for VOX among military personnel

Table 1 shows the share of individuals in the sample who report voting intentions for VOX depending on whether they are members of the armed forces or not, and on their self-reported ideology. Descriptive data already reveals striking asymmetries in support for VOX. While close to one in twenty (6.2%) civilian individuals identify as VOX supporters, this proportion is dwarfed by the more than one in four (27.3%) among members of the armed forces. Comparing only individuals on the same ideological spectrum, the share of VOX support among the military is consistently higher than among civilians who report similar ideological placement. Within the subsample of right-leaning voters, those most ideologically predisposed to support far-right parties, we find majority support for VOX (more than half of the military sample) which is more than double that observed among symmetrically right-wing civilians.

Table 1: Support for VOX depending on being on the military and ideology

	All	Leftist	Center	Rightist
Military	27.3% (542)	3.2% (63)	16% (282)	51.3% (197)
Non-military	6.2% (51545)	0.3% (15799)	4.1% (27469)	24.3% (8277)
<i>n</i>	52087	15862	27751	8474

Note: Percentages refer to the share of individuals who report voting for VOX, respective to the whole sample. Self-reported ideology (1-10 scale): 1-3 = left, 4-6 = center, 7-10 = right.

In Table 2 we show results for the logistic models. Model 1 estimates the difference between citizens and military personnel in a baseline model that only includes barometer and municipality fixed effects. Model 2 includes the socio-demographic control variables and Model 3 also includes a measure of left-right placement. Finally, Model

4 includes an interaction between the military indicator and the left-right measure, testing if the presence of a military gap is conditioned by where individuals fall on the ideological distribution. In other words, the interaction term tests whether military personnel are more likely to support the far-right even when we only compare individuals with extreme right-wing or conservative preferences.

We present models with and without ideological position given that ideological preferences may be causally posterior to military employment and, as a result, may bias the point-estimate of the military coefficient. Indeed, we show in the Appendix that individuals associated with the military are significantly more right-leaning than the average citizen. In particular, in our sample, military personnel have an average ideological position of 5.9, which is significantly greater than that of civilians (4.6), by around 0.6 standard deviations.

Table 2: Individual-level analyses on VOX support

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	−2.018*** (0.204)	−2.763*** (0.215)	−6.322*** (0.235)	−6.191*** (0.285)
Military	1.561*** (0.159)	1.219*** (0.135)	0.880*** (0.159)	1.146** (0.354)
Ideology (left-right)			0.685*** (0.018)	0.680*** (0.020)
Military × Ideology				−0.036 (0.053)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Municipality FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	58,545	57,623	51,509	51,951
Akaike Inf. Crit.	26,233.180	24,235.030	17,794.520	18,032.230

Note: + $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. All models include barometer-clustered SE. Controls: gender, age, education level, religion, employment status.

All models in Table 2 provide robust empirical support for H1. Across our estimations, we observe a significant increase in the probability of voting for the far-right. The magnitude of the gap in support for VOX associated with military personnel is substantive. In the case of Model 1, where we do not consider individual demograph-

ics but only municipal and survey-wave fixed effects, individuals in the military as 4.7 times as likely to vote for VOX as the rest. Including individual-level covariates does little to reduce the explanatory effect of military associations: individuals in the military are still more than three times as likely to vote for VOX. When considering the role of ideological preferences (Model 3), the independent effect of being in the armed forces is slightly smaller, but still substantive and significant. The independent effect of the military coefficient demonstrates that the gap between military personnel and civilians can be explained by ideological incongruence between the two groups alone. Over and above the correlation between ideology and far-right support, military associations have an independent effect. The variation in the outcome measure associated with the military coefficient is likely capturing the effects of the socialisation processes that we theorise take place within the military itself, or the result of occupation-specific incentives related to, for example, increased military spending advocated by the far-right.

Finally, in Model 4 we include the interaction with the ideology measure to probe whether being in the military has an effect across different ideological positions. Figure 1 shows the results graphically. The results show that, independently of the ideological position of the individual, those in the military are always significantly more likely to vote for VOX. Even if this difference is small among respondents who identify on the far-left—mostly because overall levels of support for VOX are much smaller, the effect holds across the whole ideological spectrum. In the Appendix we show tests of the linearity assumptions (Hainmueller, Mummolo & Xu, 2019) that demonstrate that the effects of the interaction models are robust.

Local-level evidence

In the previous analyses, we show robust individual-level evidence in support of our theoretical expectations regarding support for far-right parties among individuals in the military, demonstrating that military personnel in Spain are significantly and substantively more prone to support VOX than civilians. Here we complement

Figure 1: Effect of being in the military, conditioned by ideological placement

these individual-level analyses. Leveraging data on the location of military facilities in Spain, we test whether census sections that host military facilities have higher electoral support for VOX (H2) and whether there is evidence of spatial diffusion into neighbouring sections (H3 and H4).

Empirics

We use data at the level of census sections.⁷ Our dependent variable is the electoral support for VOX in the April 2019 general elections,⁸ measured between 0 and 1, using data from the Spanish Ministry of Interior. We downloaded data at the level of polling stations and aggregate them to match census sections.

Our main independent variable is whether a given census section is home to a military facility. In the analyses testing the diffusion hypothesis, we code different measures of section-level distance to military facilities. Additionally, we test whether the diffusion effect is conditional on local susceptibility to support the far-right (H4) including an interaction between the existence of a military facility nearby with the section-level mean household income. We use local income levels because of the consolidated electoral success of the far-right among individuals and locations that fall on the higher end of the income ladder (Rama et al., 2021). We also include in all models several controls and province fixed effects.

⁷In Spain, census sections or tracts (*secciones censales*) are sub-local geographical areas covering between 1,000 and 2,500 residents, except in smaller municipalities where they comprise the whole municipal area. Our dataset includes a total of 36,232 census sections in 8,129 municipalities.

⁸We also include results using the November 2019 elections in the Appendix. Results do not change.

Figure 2: Location of military facilities

Military facilities

We code the location of military facilities in all Spanish provinces except Ceuta and Melilla⁹ using information publicly available on the websites of the Spanish Armed Forces, including the Army (*Ejército de Tierra*), the Navy (*Armada*), and the Air Force (*Ejército del Aire*).¹⁰ We only include military bases or HQs, including military academies, but exclude cultural facilities (e.g. museums). We do not include locations exclusive to the other branches (e.g., the Common Corps, the Royal Guard, and the Emergencies Unit), even though they usually share space with units of the main branches. Figure 2 shows the location of military facilities in Spain.

⁹We exclude the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla because of their particular characteristics: they have a much smaller size than any other province, they have a historical military tradition as major *plazas de soberanía*—strongholds of Spanish sovereignty in North Africa—and still host a disproportionately high number of military facilities to this day.

¹⁰Army: <https://ejercito.defensa.gob.es/unidades/index.html>; Navy: <https://armada.defensa.gob.es/ArmadaPortal/page/Portal/ArmadaEspannola/conocenosdespliegue>; Air Force: <https://ejercitodelaire.defensa.gob.es/EA/ejercitodelaire/es/organizacion/unidades/> (all accessed 06/05/2021).

For the diffusion analyses, we use three different measures of proximity. First, we measure whether a given census section has any contiguous section with military facilities (using queen contiguity). Second, we define neighbours as those sections whose centroids are within 2 kilometers and indicate whether there is any neighboring section with military facilities. Finally, we include a measure of inverse logged distance, calculated as $1/\ln(\text{mindist})$, where *mindist* is the distance in meters to the closest military facility. In the models focused on diffusion, we exclude census sections that are home to a military facility from the sample.

One potential concern for unbiased identification is that military facilities might be non-randomly distributed in higher-income areas within a city, which could confound the relationship between the location of military facilities and support for VOX. We have minimized the potential for this bias in two ways. First, the relationship between income and military facilities might be less concerning when focusing on specific regions and only comparing census sections within the same city. The left panel in Figure 3 shows the income distribution of census sections with and without military facilities throughout Spain, while the right panel shows this relationship limiting the sample to cities with at least 50,000 inhabitants. In the latter, it is clear that many of the low-income sections are located in rural areas or smaller cities where there are barely any military facilities. In addition to controlling for household income at the section level, we use provincial fixed-effects and, in many cases, limit the sample to a limited area around military facilities or specifically to large cities, in order to minimize selection bias. Moreover, we also run the basic models in a subset of the wealthiest census sections ($> Q_3$), where following to the visualisations in Figure 3, the bias should be minimal.

Second, rather than trying to completely isolate the effect of having nearby military facilities independent of income, we think that household wealth might help *explain* the mobilization effects of the location of military facilities. Models that include an interaction between military facilities and household income should help us account

Figure 3: Sections with military facilities and household income

for the potential confounding, besides showing the moderating effect of income on diffusion (H4).

Control variables

At the level of census sections, we control for electoral turnout, (logged) census section population, and (logged) mean household income. Data on household income, which is included as an interaction in some models, and the census section population come from Spain's National Statistical Institute (INE).¹¹ We use the mean disposable household income and population in 2017, the latest year for which data is available at the level of census sections.

In addition, we also control for the (logged) population of the municipality the census section belongs to, and include a binary indicator in all sections of municipalities that have hosted the HQ of a military region (Barcelona, Burgos, A Coruña, Granada, Madrid, Sevilla, Valencia, Valladolid, and Zaragoza).

¹¹Available at https://www.ine.es/experimental/atlas/exp_atlas_tab.htm (accessed 16/11/2021).

Models

For the first analysis, we use regular Ordinary Least Squares (OLS), where we include municipality fixed effects. Some models restrict the sample, such as restricting the analysis to census sections within 20km of a military facility or only including census sections in large cities (over 50,000 inhabitants).

We also use spatial models. In particular, we include results using spatial error models (SEM) and spatial Durbin error models (SDEM), to account for non-local effects of the predictors. In all these three cases, we use the three measures of contiguity described above (queen-type contiguity, neighbours within 2km, and inverse logged distance) as spatial weights matrices for the SEM and SDEM models.

Military facilities and local support for VOX

Our second hypothesis posits that support for VOX should be higher in census sections that are home to a military facility. Visualising the descriptive statistics suggests that there is indeed an increase in far-right support in those areas. Figure 4 shows the distribution of VOX's vote share in census sections with and without military facilities in both April and November 2019 elections. Even though the number of observations with military facilities is obviously much smaller, the mean vote share is substantively and significantly higher in the latter. While the mean level of support for VOX in April 2019 data is 10.2% in census sections without military facilities, the average vote share in those that host military facilities is of 15.5%. Given VOX's overall vote revenue in April 2019 equated to 12.6%. This 5%-point gap is of a sizable magnitude relative to the party's overall national success.

A closer look at a particular city evinces the same point. Figure 5 shows both the location of military facilities (red dots) and census section-level support for VOX in April 2019 elections in the city of Madrid. Most of the military locations are in census sections with an above-average level of support for VOX. Moreover, there are reasons to believe that the relationship between the location of military facilities and far-right

Figure 4: Sections with military facilities and VOX electoral support

support goes beyond the immediate local level, suggesting a spatial diffusion effect which we explore in the next section.

Turning towards the statistical evidence, Table 3 shows the results of our baseline models, including a binary indicator of presence of military facilities in a given census section. The coefficient is positive and significant across all specifications, which include the full sample (Model 1), only sections within 20km of military facilities (Model 2), only sections in municipalities with at least 50,000 inhabitants (Model 3), only sections in municipalities that were the heads of military regions (Model 4), and only the wealthiest sections (Model 5). In all these models, census sections with military facilities report around 3.5-4 more points in support for VOX, controlling for the other covariates and including province fixed effects. Given that the median (and mean) level of census-section support for VOX is around 10%, this means a 40% increase in VOX support.

Overall, we find robust evidence that census sections that host military facilities show higher electoral support for VOX, supporting H2. These sections obviously include both military personnel and civilians, and it is likely that part of the differ-

Figure 5: Military facilities and VOX support in Madrid city

Table 3: Support for VOX and military presence

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(Intercept)	-0.227*** (0.006)	-0.291*** (0.008)	-0.781*** (0.021)	-0.348*** (0.032)	-0.732*** (0.017)
Military facility	0.040*** (0.003)	0.037*** (0.003)	0.034*** (0.003)	0.038*** (0.004)	0.040*** (0.004)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	33,905	20,181	10,064	5,893	8,477
R ²	0.614	0.667	0.694	0.731	0.815
Adjusted R ²	0.613	0.666	0.693	0.730	0.814

Note: + $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Models 1 includes full sample. Model 2 includes only sections within 20km of military facilities. Model 3 includes only municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants in 2017. Model 4 only includes municipalities that were HQ of main military regions. Model 5 restricts the sample to the wealthiest sections ($> q_3$). Controls: turnout, logged section population, logged mean household income, logged municipality population, dummy for military region capital.

ence we observe is also due to diffusion effects, at least in the sense of civilians living around military personnel and facilities being more likely to support for VOX. Yet, we test these expectations more robustly in the next section, where we drop from the sample census sections with military facilities and look at their surroundings. Although military personnel also live outside the facilities, and thus outside the census sections, we assume that their share will be much lower in neighboring sections, as these do not include military barracks or bases.

Spatial diffusion

Beyond the localised effect of military facilities, we theorise that the presence of military facilities will also likely engender a diffusion effect (H3), particularly in areas more likely to be sympathetic with right-wing parties (H4). In both cases—local and non-local effects—the increase in support for VOX might not only be due to the presence of military personnel, but also to spillover mobilization or networking dynamics that make surrounding areas more likely to support the far-right. Military personnel do not only live in sections with military facilities, and not only military personnel live in those sections. However, the diffusion mechanism is more likely to take place in neighbouring sections, where the share of military personnel should be lower as distance increases but where the mobilizing effects should still be present.

We test that expectation here, removing from the sample all census sections with military presence, and including different measures of distance to the closest military facility in the remaining sample. Table 4 shows results of linear models using the three different measures of distance: military facilities in contiguous sections, in sections within 2km, or the inverse logged distance to the closest facility. Across all three specifications, results show that census sections that are closer to military facilities display higher support for VOX. These significant results are consistent with our expectations of spatial diffusion.

Table 5 replicates this analysis with the inclusion of a multiplicative interaction term between the distance to the military and mean household income variables. Our

Table 4: Support for VOX and nearby military presence

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(Intercept)	−0.221*** (0.006)	−0.224*** (0.006)	−0.241*** (0.006)
Military in contiguous section	0.016*** (0.001)		
Military within 2km		0.007*** (0.001)	
Inverse logged distance (m)			0.196*** (0.017)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	33,769	33,769	33,769
R ²	0.616	0.615	0.615
Adjusted R ²	0.615	0.614	0.615

Note: + $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. All models exclude census sections with army facilities from the sample. Controls: turnout, logged section population, logged municipality population, dummy for military region capital.

expectations from [H4](#) assume that the influence of spatial propinquity will be greater amongst wealthier census tracts. Figure 6 shows the results graphically for the contiguity and inverse logged distance specifications. Again, the findings provide significant empirical support for the presence of a sizeable diffusion effect but mainly in those sections where, we argue, far-right mobilization is more likely to be successful. That is, in the lowest-income sections, having a military facility nearby has a negative effect on electoral support but VOX, but this relationship is the opposite in high-income sections, where nearby military presence increases support for VOX. These findings are consistent with the argument that out-group contact might trigger asymmetric responses among those who view the out-group as threatening. In the Appendix, we show these results are robust to different samples, including only sections within 20km of any military facility, only large municipalities, and only municipalities that were HQs of military regions.

One potential concern of these analyses is that normal linear models do not correctly account for spatial autocorrelation, and may also fail to consider spatial dependence. In order to account for this, we use spatial modelling. In particular, we show

Table 5: Support for VOX and nearby military presence

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(Intercept)	−0.211*** (0.006)	−0.180*** (0.006)	0.533*** (0.034)
Military in contiguous section	−0.250*** (0.026)		
Military within 2km		−0.309*** (0.015)	
Inverse logged distance (m)			−6.712*** (0.301)
(Log) Household income	0.021*** (0.001)	0.018*** (0.001)	−0.053*** (0.003)
Contiguous × Income	0.026*** (0.003)		
Within 2km × Income		0.031*** (0.001)	
Inv. dist. × Income			0.675*** (0.029)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	33,769	33,769	33,769
R ²	0.617	0.620	0.621
Adjusted R ²	0.617	0.619	0.620

Note: + $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. All models exclude census sections with army facilities from the sample. Controls: turnout, logged section population, logged municipality population, dummy for military region capital.

Figure 6: Nearby military facilities, mean income, and VOX support

results for spatial error models (SEM), which account for spatial autocorrelation in the error term, and spatial Durbin error models (SDEM), which explicitly model non-local effects of predictors. Table 6 shows the results for the SEM, while table 7 shows the results for the SDEM. In both cases, we still see evidence of spatial diffusion. The SEM demonstrate that the results of the linear models are not sensitive to the presence of spatial autocorrelation. More interestingly, the SDEM show that the spatial lag of military facilities has a significantly positive effect in all cases with the sole exception of the model using sections within 2km as the definition of neighbour matrix. Moreover, model selection also supports the diffusion hypothesis, as including spatial lags improves the fit of the model.¹²

To illustrate the substantial effects, Figure 7 shows the predicted effect of a new military facility in a random section of Gijón, a major city in the north coast. Although the biggest increase in VOX support takes place in the section with military presence (around 2 more points of electoral share), surrounding areas can expect an increase in VOX electoral share of around 0.5 points. This change corresponds to a 5% increase in the median level of support for VOX. The presence of military facilities can, therefore,

¹²Likelihood-ratio tests between the SDEM and SEM show a statistically significant difference (LR test = 18.00, p-value = 0.006 for the model with the contiguity matrix, LR test = 139.37, p-value = 0.000 for the model with the 2km neighbour matrix, and LR test = 868.27, p-value = 0.000 for the model with the inverse distance matrix).

Table 6: Spatial Error Models on support for VOX

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(Intercept)	−0.250*** (0.010)	−0.327*** (0.010)	5.305** (1.839)
Military facility	0.017*** (0.002)	0.027*** (0.003)	0.037*** (0.003)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lambda	0.89***	0.91***	1.00***
Observations	20,181	20,181	20,181
Akaike Inf. Crit.	−89,567.300	−81,501.060	−78,956.110

Note: $+p < 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.001$. Models 1 includes spatial weights based on queen-type contiguity. Model 2 does so identifying neighbors as sections within 2km. Model 3 uses spatial weights based on the inverse logged distance (m). Controls: turnout, logged section population, logged municipality population, dummy for military region capital.

Table 7: Spatial Durbin Error Models on support for VOX

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(Intercept)	−0.260*** (0.012)	−0.332*** (0.010)	11.088*** (1.860)
Military facility	0.022*** (0.002)	0.027*** (0.003)	0.038*** (0.003)
Military (spatial lag)	0.017** (0.005)	0.019 (0.013)	2.441*** (0.121)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lambda	0.89***	0.90***	1.00***
Observations	20,181	20,181	20,181
Akaike Inf. Crit.	−89,573.300	−81,628.430	−79,812.380

Note: $+p < 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.001$. Models 1 includes spatial weights based on queen-type contiguity. Model 2 does so identifying neighbors as sections within 2km. Model 3 uses spatial weights based on the inverse logged distance (m). Controls: turnout, logged section population, logged municipality population, dummy for military region capital.

have a substantive incremental effect on far-right support. In a electoral system where minimum thresholds can determine far-right party entry, the non-trivial boost in support engendered by the presence of military bases has the potential to push far-right parties over the threshold and increase their legislative representation.

Figure 7: Predicted effect on VOX support of a new military facility is a random section of Gijón (Asturias), using the SDEM model with a contiguity weights matrix

Conclusion

While previous literature on the socio-demographic characteristics of far-right voters present a rich and thick description of those inclined to cast their vote for far-right parties, a hitherto under-tested variable is individual and localised association with the armed forces. Military personnel are a segment of the population with a clear ideological symmetry that makes them a prime source of far-right electoral revenue.

In this article, we present the first empirical analyses drawing an empirical link between the armed forces and support for the far-right. Using the case of the far-right party in Spain, VOX, and utilising a large dataset consisting of more than fifty thousand individuals, we demonstrate that citizens who are individually linked to the military are more likely to vote for far-right parties. We show that this association

is robust to conditioning on conventional socio-demographics as well as ideological preferences. In other words, we demonstrate that the military-civilian gap in far-right support cannot be explained away by the former exhibiting more right-wing preferences, but instead suggests that socialisation processes within the armed forces and the occupation-specific incentives (Kohn, 2001) are likely determining mechanisms that explain the variation that cannot be explained by ideological disparities between the two groups.

Additionally, using data at the level of census tracts, we find that areas with military presence produce higher vote shares for VOX and, additionally, that there is strong evidence of spatial diffusion. The findings of our spatial regression models demonstrate that the presence of military barracks can engender spillover effects with individuals in neighbouring census tracts significantly more inclined to vote for the far-right than those areas that are more spatially independent. We argue that these effects are due to the influence of military symbolism, which underscore nationalist and authoritarian values, and everyday interactions with members of the armed forces. The fact that local income levels moderate these diffusion effects is coherent with the idea that the presence of military facilities helps mobilize support for the far-right.

These findings clearly contribute to the broader literature on political geography in general, and the far-right in particular. The location of state institutions that result in the non-random clustering of certain subgroups of the population can lead to localised electoral outcomes that might not have occurred in the absence of these geographical clusters. More generally, our findings provide strong empirical evidence that the influence of association with the armed forces is not unique to only those individuals that form part of the military's personnel. Relying on fine-grained data from polling locations in neighbouring districts, we demonstrate that the feedback effects engendered by the presence of state institutions in specific localities.

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