Partisanship: the true ally of fake news? A comparative analysis of the effect on belief and spread

Partidismo: ¿el verdadero aliado de las *fake news*? Un análisis comparativo del efecto sobre la creencia y la divulgación

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How to cite this article
Baptista, J. P., Correia, E., Gradim, A, & Piñeiro-Naval, V. (2021). Partisanship: the true ally of fake news? A comparative analysis of the effect on belief and spread. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 79, 23-47. https://www.doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2021-1509

ABSTRACT
Introduction: After the recomposition of the Portuguese parliament with the emergence of the radical right, this study explores the influence of partisan orientation on the belief and dissemination of fake news. **Methodology:** An exploratory sample was used (N = 712), whose participants were exposed to 20 politically biased headlines (pro-right and pro-left): half fake news and the other half true news. Participants evaluated their credibility and willingness to share them on social media. Results: Right-wing supporters are more likely to create and share compatible fake news. This trend was verified in all the measurement parameters of partisanship ((1) voting intention, (2) partisan sympathy and (3) self-placement on the I-D scale), in contrast to what was revealed with left-wing partisans. **Discussion and conclusions**: Only right-wing supporters show a tendency to believe more in fake news that favors their orientation. The same is not the case with left-wing individuals. However, both right-wing and left-wing supporters are more likely to share biased content. We believe that people with a right-wing party identity may be more exposed to disinformation in Portugal, as most disinformation sites seek this specific audience.

RESUMEN
Introducción: Tras la recomposición del parlamento portugués con la aparición de la derecha radical, este estudio explora la influencia de la orientación partidista en la creencia y difusión de *fake news*. **Metodología:** Se recurrió a una muestra exploratoria (*N* = 712), cuyos participantes fueron expuestos a 20 titulares políticamente sesgados (pro-derecha y pro-izquierda): la mitad *fake news* y la otra mitad noticias verdaderas. Los participantes evaluaron su credibilidad y voluntad de compartirlas en las redes sociales. **Resultados:** Es más probable que los partidarios de derecha crean y compartan *fake news* compatibles. Esta tendencia se verificó en todos los parámetros de medición del partidismo —(1) intención de voto, (2) simpatía partidaria y (3) autoubicación en la escala I-D—, en contraste con lo revelado con los partidistas de izquierda. **Discusión y conclusiones:** Solo los partidarios de derecha muestran una tendencia a creer más en *fake news* que favorecen su orientación. No ocurre lo mismo con los individuos de izquierdas. Sin embargo, es más probable que tanto los partidarios de derecha como de izquierda compartan contenido sesgado. Creemos que las personas con identidad de partido de derecha pueden estar más expuestas a la desinformación en Portugal, ya que la mayoría de los sitios de desinformación buscan esta audiencia específica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Fake news; Noticias; Desinformación; Partidismo; Polarización política; Derecha; Izquierda.

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<div align="center">Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)</div>

1. Introduction

Although the creation and spread of fake news have always existed, especially to achieve political and ideological objectives (Burkhardt, 2017), it was with the 2016 US presidential elections that the phenomenon began to gain media coverage (Wendling, 2018), becoming a global threat. On the one hand, the wide dissemination of fake news threatens journalism because it discredits the profession by becoming one more competitor on the Internet and reducing the authority of journalistic practice as a builder of knowledge (Russell, 2019; Waisbord, 2018). On the other hand, fake news has contributed to the deterioration of democracy, normalizing lies in political discourse and serving as an instrument of a political battle that has contributed to the breakdown of public trust in institutions (Fernández, 2019).

Contemporary fake news is a type of online misinformation that mimics the format of traditional news or information, intentionally created to deceive or manipulate the reader with misleading and/or totally false statements (Baptista and Gradim, 2020a). Recent literature points to the current chaos of public communication (distrust of institutions, political polarization, social networks, distrust of the

media) as a justification for the emergence of the post-truth era (Bennett and Livingston, 2018; Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

In 2016, an estimated 75% of Americans may have believed false stories (Silverman and Singer-Vine, 2016). Silverman et al. (2016) revealed a series of ultra-partisan political pages and sites on Facebook, through which false, misleading, and biased information was spread to thousands of followers, successively replicated through social networks. Later, in 2020, during the US elections, Donald Trump, still as president of the United States, spread false and misleading information during the vote count (Conger, 2020; Dean, 2020; Dilanian, 2020) by asserting that it was fraudulent, which contributed to his followers accepting a false belief (Pennycook and Rand, 2021).

These successive manipulations of the truth, in various contexts, are accelerating the decline of public trust in the various democratic institutions; namely, in journalism, the integrity of journalists being the target of physical attacks and infamies in several countries (Bennett and Livingston, 2018; MMF, 2021). Even so, in 2020, the Portuguese, along with the Finns, were the ones who trusted the news the most (56%), a value higher than the international average (37%) (Cardoso et al. 2020). Likewise, 7 out of 10 Portuguese recognize that journalism plays an important role for society, a fact that may be related to the political-ideological and partisan neutrality of the Portuguese media over the years, which has allowed the traditional media to be associated with professionalism, placing them outside the sphere of political control (Da Silva et al. 2017; Fishman, 2011; Hallin and Mancini, 2017). However, Portugal complies with the trend of increasing distrust in the news that has been observed worldwide, with trust falling from 65.6% (2016) to 56.5% in 2020 (Cardoso et al., 2020). On the other hand, the Portuguese are among the most concerned about online misinformation (76%), only surpassed by Brazilians (88%) in this ranking. The international average is 56%, and the Dutch, Slovaks, and Germans are the least concerned (Cardoso et al. 2020). In Portugal, similar to what has been happening in other countries, disinformation sites are growing and gaining more followers, especially on Facebook (Cardoso et al. 2019; ISCTE, 2019; Pena, 2018a, 2018b, 2019b), while they continue to spread falsehoods during the elections, especially against the Portuguese left-wing government and produced by the extreme right (Baptista and Gradim, 2020b).

The literature has provided a series of explanations, of a psychological nature, as reasons for the spread and consumption of this type of content: due to the strong emotions and feelings that they provoke (Albright, 2017; Berger and Milkman, 2012; Bright, 2016), and also because they exploit prejudices or social, political, and public sympathies (Faragó et al., 2020; Van Bavel and Pereira, 2018). Human beings tend to more easily accept arguments that confirm their ideological and partisan beliefs (Deppe et al. 2015; Gorman and Gorman, 2016), allowing their behaviors and attitudes to be clearly influenced by their political affiliation. Furthermore, partisan identity also influences behavior such as, for example, the argumentation of users in social networks (Ordaz et al., 2016). Moreover, the ideological-partisan agreement motivates them to seek "informative" content compatible with their vision of the world (opinion, values, or beliefs), even if it is false (Lee et al., 2019). This "homophily" inherent in the human mind, replicated in the digital universe, plays a crucial role in defining the algorithmic behavior of social networks, creating echo chambers and/or filter bubbles (Flaxman et al., 2016; Lorenz -Spreen et al., 2020; Pariser, 2011) that not only limit the user to homogeneous opinions but can also promote the spread of disinformation and the political polarization of individuals.

Having identified the social and political problem that fake news and disinformation, in general, represent, the main objective of this work is to understand the relationship between partisanship and the belief and spread of fake news and real news in Portugal. We believe that this research, applied to the Portuguese electorate, is an original and relevant contribution to current literature, clearly focused

on the American scene. Furthermore, fake news in Portugal still requires further research. With the growing increase in political populisms (Fernández García and Salgado, 2020; Santana-Pereira and Cancela, 2021), as well as the increase in the number of misinformation sites, threats to journalists, and racist and violent discourse in the country (Alberti, 2020), we consider that it is the crucial moment to try to understand the relationship between the consumption of fake news and party identity. In sum, it is hoped that this study can indicate which of the two groups (with party identities of the left or right) may be more inclined to believe and spread fake news, and how party bias influences the way they judge the news and fake content.

2. Partisanship and belief in fake news

The way we process information has been a widely addressed topic in the field of psychology, especially regarding cognitive ability (Deppe et al., 2015; Pennycook and Rand, 2019; Roets, 2017). Individuals with lower levels of cognitive ability, that is, with more intuitive, less skeptical interpretations associated with less effort, are positively correlated with a greater tendency or vulnerability to believe in doubtful and false information, as is the case of fake news (Deppe et al., 2015; Pennycook and Rand, 2019; Roets, 2017). For example, in the American scenario, conservatives are less calculating than liberals (Deppe et al., 2015; Jost et al., 2003; Swire et al., 2017) and are more likely to create and share fake news (Pennycook and Rand, 2019). On the other hand, motivated reasoning (such as party identity) has also been one of the most influential factors in the valuation of information (Van Bavel and Pereira, 2018) and the formation of public opinion (Bolsen et al., 2014; Leeper and Slothuus, 2014), changing people's judgment and political behavior. This ideological-partisan motivation, also related to cognitive aspects, promotes the protection of pre-existing opinions, beliefs, and values, motivating a biased interpretation of political issues, even when false information is corrected (fact-checking) (Shin and Thorson, 2017).

In this sense, Faragó et al. (2020) showed that supporters of government policies in Hungary were more susceptible to believing in fake news than those most critical of the government, and vice versa. On the American political scene, once again, Uscinski et al. (2016) argue that Republicans tend to reject the theory that President Bush was an accomplice to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, while Democrats are more likely to believe it. The same is true, in reverse, with the false theory that President Obama was not born in the United States. Other studies have also supported this perspective, noting that party identity can influence both left and right-wing people (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Nyhan and Reifler, 2010; Pereira and Van Bavel, 2018; Uscinski et al., 2016). Regarding non-political fake news, for instance, Pereira and Van Bavel (2018) argue that Republicans are more likely to share fake news compared to Democrats.

In general, right-wing individuals, especially those on the extreme right, seem more vulnerable to fake news in terms of both belief and dissemination (Baptista and Gradim, 2020a; Halpern et al., 2019; Lewis and Marwick, 2017; Marwick, 2018; Recuero and Gruzd, 2019). On the one hand, online misinformation is linked to a conservative and extremist vision, associated with radical measures against corruption (Baptista and Gradim, 2020b; ISCTE, 2019), social, sexual, and racial minorities or immigration, and Islam (Câncio, 2020; Humprecht, 2019). On the other hand, the right-wing populist narrative resembles the persuasive narrative that is repeated in fake news (Baptista, 2020). It should be noted that the radical right labeled as "fake news" those that did not favor their political leader or its ideologies. Journalistic legitimacy was then challenged not only by Trump's speech in the United States but also by the German radical right (for example, by the anti-refugee movement PEGIDA: Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicisation of the Occident and the Alternative for Germany party) (Brauck et al., 2016). In Portugal, the Portuguese radical right has also threatened journalists [1], a fact that may be associated with the spread and consumption of

online misinformation (Pena 2018b, 2018a, 2019; Câncio 2020; Baptista and Gradim, 2020b), the activity of digital militias, and the massive performance of false profiles that seek to impose the ideology of the Chega party (Carvalho, 2020b; Silva, 2020).

3. The reorganization of the Portuguese party system

Until the previous Portuguese legislative elections (2019), most of the parties that had parliamentary representation (the most relevant for the party system, Sartori, 2005), existed since the establishment of democracy, over 40 years ago. This shows that there was a rapid consolidation of the party system since its formation period refers to the years immediately after the 1974 Revolution. The left and right-wing dichotomy has served to frame a multiparty political system, with government alternation between two moderate parties: Socialist Party (PS), center-left, and Social Democratic Party (PSD), center-right, except for some coalitions between the PSD and the Social Democratic Center-Popular Party (CDS-PP) of the far-right wing (Jalali and Cabral, 2003; Lisi, 2016, 2019). So, the political system was constituted by the traditional (and more conservative) radical left of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) (Freire, 2017; March, 2012; Pereira, 2016), the new left of the "Bloco de Esquerda" (BE) (Lisi, 2013), and, more recently, "Pessoas-Animais-Natureza" (PAN) linked to the animal and environmental cause (Catarino, 2017); in the center-left the PS, the center-right by the PSD (Guedes, 2012, 2016), and on the right, in the more conservative wing, the CDS-PP (Jalali and Cabral, 2003; Lisi, 2016, 2019).

In 2019, three newly created parties joined the Portuguese political system. The Livre Party (L) on the left, the Liberal Initiative (IL) and Chega (CH) on the right. Therefore, Livre seems to occupy a libertarian, pro-European left in the ideological line of the Green New Deal (Fernandes and Magalhaes, 2020); IL stands as a liberal right-wing party in economic and social terms (Fernandes and Magalhaes, 2020; Lisi, 2019), but above all with a special focus on market deregulation, privatization, and the reduction of the role of the State in the economic agenda (Jalali at al., 2021). Finally, the emergence of the CH ends with the exception, which had been observed until then in Portugal, of the failure of the populist and anti-system political parties (Carreira da Silva and Salgado, 2018), causing the radical right to achieve unprecedented visibility (Costa, 2011; de Almeida, 2015). Chega's parliamentary representation, even with a single deputy, represented the emergence of the radical populist right in Portugal (Lisi et al., 2021; Mendes and Dennison, 2020), which may have to do with the poor electoral performance not only of centrist parties but also right-wing parties (Lisi et al., 2021). Chega resembles other parties of the radical right, such as Vox, in Spain, especially in dealing with issues such as immigration and Islam (Mendes and Dennison, 2020). If until the previous legislative elections, PS and PSD received the label of "catch-all parties", due to how they have remained in power and seek to maximize votes (Belchior, 2015; Jalali and Cabral, 2003), CH has the objective of "capturing the largest number of disgruntled people across the political spectrum and abstention" (Marchi, 2019), with an anti-system narrative that mobilizes voters from all parties (Lisi et al., 2021) and a program that advocates tougher sentences for more serious crimes and increased security (Fernandes and Magalhaes, 2020; Mendes and Dennison, 2020).

In this way, the Portuguese party system underwent a reformulation of the entire political spectrum, but with special emphasis on the right. Even so, the representation of small parties does not seem to affect, for the moment, the hegemony of the parties of the governance arch (Lisi et al., 2021).

4. Methodology

To achieve the objectives proposed at the beginning of the work, a questionnaire was applied that sought to know the ability of the Portuguese electorate to distinguish fake news from real news, expressing their opinion on the level of credibility of the headlines presented and their will to share this information with their friends. A self-administered and online questionnaire was sent to Portuguese people over 18 years of age. The final sample consists of 712 participants from all regions of the country and was available for six months (between March and September 2020). This study continues the research started by Baptista et al. (2021). Therefore, we analyzed the same participants (N=712). However, the present analysis focuses on a different part of the questionnaire concerning the identity of the respondents and party orientation. In the previous study (Baptista et al., 2021), the participants were ideologically classified according to their moral, religious, social, and socioeconomic attitudes and values. In this research, we seek to understand how partisanship — (1) voting intention, (2) liking of the party, and (3) self-placement on the left-right political scale— is related to the belief and spread of fake news. The respondents are distributed, therefore, as follows: 34.4% men and 65.6% women, with 23.6% having basic education, 37.5% with a university degree, 25.9% have a master's degree, and 13 % doctorates. Regarding the age of the respondents, 40.6% are between 18 and 30 years old; 23% between 31 and 40 years old, and 36.4% are over 41 years old.

4.1. Procedures

To understand the propensity of the Portuguese to consume fake news, participants were invited to indicate the level of credibility and willingness to share fake news and real news headlines in a Facebook post format (photo, title, signature, and source, as in Image 1 and Image 2) (Baptista et al., 2021). This method has already been used successfully in other studies (Bronstein et al., 2019; Pennycook and Rand, 2019).

Image 1: *Example of pro-left fake news in Facebook post format*
Source: Adapted from the fact-checking website (Polígrafo). Available at: https://bit.ly/3jvJC8N

Image 2: *Example of pro-right news in Facebook post format*
Source: Image adapted from jornaldenegocios.pt. Available at: https://bit.ly/2OiaxcO

The questionnaire was divided into 2 sections: (1) random exposure to headlines and fake news, (2) questions related to the identity and party orientation of the participants (voting intention, degree of sympathy for the different parties, and self-placement on the left-right scale).

Therefore, when exposed to fake news and real news headlines, people had to answer two questions for each headline: Q1. "To the best of your knowledge, how do you rate the following headline?" On a 5-point scale (1=not at all credible, 2=not very credible, 3=somewhat credible, 4=fairly credible, 5=very credible) and Q2. "What is your willingness to share the following headline?" (1=none, 2=little, 3=some, 4=a lot). These questions were asked for each of the 20 headlines presented: 10 fake news (5 pro-left and 5 pro-right) and 10 real news (5 pro-left and 5 pro-right), to establish a partisan relationship with belief and spread of real news and fake news (see Table 1). All the fake headlines we used were taken from Polígrafo [2], a Portuguese online fact-checker. The real news headlines were selected from news sources that had unusual headlines, to require the same effort from the participants when they were questioned (Baptista et al., 2021).

Table 1. *Fake news and real news headlines that were used in the questionnaire.*

	Headline	Adaptation/Source (URLs)
Pro-right news	The PCP forces its deputies to donate part of their salary to the party	https://bit.ly/2YZJTaJ
	The public investment of "geringonça" will be below the last year of the Government PSD/CDS	https://bit.ly/2OiaxcO
	"In these four years, we had the highest tax burden in history"	https://bit.ly/3cUffHU
	The ANTRAM spokesperson is a member of the PS and was appointed to two positions by the current Government	https://bit.ly/3jC6tQg
	Costa's new executive has had the most ministers since 1976	https://bit.ly/36QnMaY
Pro-left news	PSD deputy calls the sexual orientation class "shit" and motivates BE's complaint	https://bit.ly/36Qo7KM
	Since 28 years ago there were not so few registered unemployed	https://bit.ly/3aIsfhb
	Bloco is the only parliamentary party with accounts without irregularities	https://bit.ly/3jumgAi
	Durão Barroso's son was hired by Banco de Portugal "by invitation and without bidding"	https://bit.ly/3juxVPD
	40 years ago, the PSD sentenced the law that created the NHS	https://bit.ly/3jC8koc
Pro-right Fake News	With the "geringonça" in power, the price of a barrel of oil fell by 50% while the price of diesel rose by 40%	https://bit.ly/3q2GNP8
	Catarina Martins defends RSI of 750 euros "for gypsies, migrants, and others"	https://bit.ly/3cP4PcB
	Joacine Katar Moreira do Livre only started to stutter in this electoral campaign	https://bit.ly/3p1i9gj
	PAN electoral program "proposes forgiveness to sexual rapists"	https://bit.ly/3cS9RoF
	The Socialist Party does not want the Portuguese to know who are the politicians who receive lifetime grants	https://bit.ly/3cOWdTn
Pro-left Fake News	Joacine Katar Moreira is the first black deputy in Portugal	https://bit.ly/3oWMooR
	Statistics from Portugal: more than half of the jobs created since 2015 have salaries above € 1,200	https://bit.ly/3a0jrE7
	Rui Rio's PSD also has a family network in political positions	https://bit.ly/3jvJC8N
	The PSD voted against the reduction of VAT on electricity that now also proposes	https://bit.ly/3q5uLEK
	The government reduced the NHS's debts with hospital providers by 50%	https://bit.ly/3d0LncK

Source: self-made

4.2. Partisanship

The partisan orientation of the electorate was measured according to three parameters: (1) intention to vote in the elections, (2) degree of sympathy for each political party with a parliamentary seat in the Assembly of the Republic, and (3) self-placement in the left-right political scale. In this way, participants were invited to position themselves on a 10-point scale, where 1=left and 10=right.

Regarding the intention to vote, the following question was posed: "If tomorrow there were elections for the Assembly of the Republic, which party would you vote for?" Respondents had 9 possible response options: left-wing, Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), Bloco de Esquerda (BE), Pessoas-Animais-Natureza (PAN), Livre (L), Socialist Party (PS); right-wing, Social Democratic Party (PSD), Social Democratic Center (CDS), Liberal Initiative (IL), Chega (CH). Considering 566 valid responses, the PS would be the party with the most votes with 30.7%, followed by PSD (18.6%), BE (17.7%), CH (9.4%), PAN (9, 4%), IL (4.8%), L (3.5%), PCP (3.5%), and CDS (2.5%).

Regarding the measurement of party sympathy, respondents had to, on a 4-point scale (1=no sympathy, 2=little sympathy, 3=some sympathy, 4=a lot of sympathy), express their relationship with each one of the marked parties. The PS was, on average, the party that generated the most sympathy among voters (*A*=2.43; *SD*=0.93); while CH was, on the contrary, the party for which voters expressed the least sympathy (*A*=1.51; *SD*=0.84).

4.3. Statistic analysis

Initially, descriptive statistics procedures of central tendency (average) and dispersion (standard deviation) were carried out regarding the evaluated variables. To verify the assumption of normality of the data, the symmetry analysis of the frequency distribution (univariate normality) was performed using the coefficients of skewness and kurtosis (flattening). Through the analysis of these values, the use of parametric tests was found adequate. Thus, multivariate variance analysis (MANOVA) was used followed, whenever possible, by variance analysis (ANOVA), and tests of multiple comparisons of averages were used to determine what differences exist between partisanship, belief, and the spreading of news and fake news. The association between variables was measured using Pearson's correlation coefficient (*r*). All statistical analyzes were performed using the SPSS v. 27.0 program (IBM SPSS 27.0, Chicago, IL). Significance values of $p<0.05$ were considered in all statistical analyzes.

5. Results

The main objective of this study was to evaluate the influence of the Portuguese electorate's party identity on the belief and spread of fake news and political news. Our results indicate, in general, that the participants had, on average, higher values of belief concerning real news compared to the levels of belief in fake news, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Descriptive measures and univariate normality*

Variables	Sample N=712			
	A±SD	Sk	Ku	Sequence
Acceptance of news[a]	2.53±0.63	0.55	0.22	1-5
Acceptance of pro-right news[a]	1.70±0.70	1.07	0.74	1-5
Acceptance of pro-left news[a]	2.07±0.75	0.33	-0.44	1-5
Acceptance of fake news[a]	1.89±0.64	0.42	-0.45	1-5
Acceptance of pro-right fake news[a]	2.48±0.69	0.66	0.24	1-5
Acceptance of pro-left fake news[a]	2.60±0.74	0.58	0.39	1-5
Willingness to share news[b]	1.52±0.58	1.12	0.95	1-4
Willingness to share pro-right news[b]	1.52±0.62	1.32	1.52	1-4
Willingness to share pro-left news[b]	1.53±0.62	1.16	0.79	1-4
Willingness to share fake news[b]	1.34±0.47	1.58	2.44	1-4
Willingness to share pro-right fake news[b]	1.29±0.47	2.01	4.22	1-4
Willingness to share pro-left fake news[b]	1.39±0.55	1.43	1.37	1-4
Self-placement on the left-right scale	4.80±1.94	0.22	-0.05	1-10
Sympathy for political parties[d]	1.93±0.49	-0.08	0.26	1-4
Sympathy for right-wing political parties[d]	1.66±0.63	0.84	0.16	1-4
Sympathy for left-wing political parties[d]	1.92±0.70	0.21	-0.89	1-4

Source: self-made
Note: Acronyms used: A=Average, SD=Standard deviation, Sk=Skewness, and Ku=Kurtosis

However, if we analyze the average belief values separately, we find that pro-left fake news and pro-right fake news have a higher acceptance than pro-left and pro-right news, respectively. Furthermore, the acceptance of pro-left fake news has a higher belief value, even than the acceptance of the news analyzed as a whole. Our results also indicate that the willingness to share is higher in all news, compared to fake news. Table 2 shows that there is, on average, more sympathy for left-wing parties than for right-wing parties and that this is an electorate that considers itself moderate, ranking close to point 5 on the political scale.

5.1. Relationship between the intention to vote (L-R) and the belief and willingness to share fake news and news

To assess whether the identity of the party, manifested through its (1) voting intention, has a statistically significant effect on the belief and willingness to share news and fake news, multivariate variance analyzes were performed. Regarding belief, the results point to the existence of statistically significant differences (Wilk's λ= 0.814; $p <0.001$). The univariate variance analysis revealed that there are significant differences only regarding the belief in pro-right fake news (FND) ($F (1, 564) = 20.720$; $p <0.001$) and in pro-right news (NVD) ($F (1, 564) = 28.649$; $p <0.001$), as we can see in Table 3.

Table 3. *Averages (A), standard deviations (SD), and univariate effects of belief and willingness to share (pro-left and pro-right) fake news by intention to vote*

Variable	Left-wing party vote (N=367) A±SD	Right-wing party vote (N=199) A±SD	F	p
FNE	2.08±0.75	2.02±0.73	0.878	0.349
FND	1.55±0.60	1.95±0.77	45.987	<0.001
NVD	2.43±0.63	2.90±0.82	57.089	<0.001
NVE	2.49±0.70	2.49±0.66	0.000	0.998
SFNE	1.45±0.58	1.33±0.48	6.645	0.010
SFND	1.25±0.46	1.40±0.52	11.766	0.001
SNVD	1.47±0.58	1.67±0.70	13.805	<0.001
SNVE	1.60±0.66	1.48±0.56	5.124	0.024

Source: self-made

Regarding the relationship between the intention to vote and the desire to share news and fake news, the data indicate that there are significant differences (Wilk's λ = 0.856; p <0.001), and in the case of this relationship they occur regarding all variables: the willingness to share pro-left (SFNE), pro-right (SFND) fake news, and the willingness to share pro-left (SNVE) and pro-right (SNVE) real news (Table 3).

In Table 3 we can also see that the participants who would vote for the right-wing parties are those with the highest average values not only concerning the belief in pro-right fake news (FND) but also in pro-right news (NVD). It should be noted that voters from left-wing parties present a slightly higher average in pro-left fake news (FNE) than right-wing voters; however, this difference is not significant (p = 0.349). Also, the same is true of the willingness to share. While left-wing voters have higher values regarding willingness to share pro-left fake news (SFNE) and pro-left news (SNVE), supporters of right-wing parties have shown a greater willingness to share fake and real pro-right content.

5.2. Relationship between the intention to vote (by party) and the belief and willingness to share fake news and news

Subsequently, we performed a multivariate variance analysis to determine whether the intention to vote (by party) significantly influences the belief and willingness to share news and fake news. The results show statistically significant differences regarding the belief in news and fake news (Wilk's λ = 0.715; p <0.001). Univariate analyzes indicated that there were significant differences between voting intention (by party) in belief in FND (F (8, 557) = 5,058; p <0.001) and belief in NVD (F (8, 557) = 4.712; p <0.001) (see Table 4). The willingness to share this information also yielded significant differences (Wilk's λ = 0.782; p <0.001) among all variables, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Averages (A), standard deviations (SD), and univariate effects of belief and willingness to share (pro-left and pro-right) fake news by intention to vote by each party*

		FNE	FND	NVD	NVE	SFNE	SFND	SNVD	SNVE
		A±SD	A±SD	A±SD	A±SD	A±SD	A±SD	A±SD	A±SD
Left	PCP	2.22±0.71	1.53±0.69	2.39±0.64	2.56±0.71	1.50±0.52	1.29±0.55	1.38±0.52	1.58±0.69
	BE	1.99±0.71	1.48±0.57	2.39±0.60	2.54±0.71	1.41±0.56	1.21±0.46	1.44±0.58	1.64±0.68
	PAN	2.02±0.78	1.53±0.62	2.48±0.52	2.31±0.57	1.30±0.55	1.18±0.42	1.39±0.49	1.38±0.48
	L	2.13±0.66	1.50±0.43	2.51±0.64	2.49±0.55	1.44±0.58	1.24±0.40	1.44±0.53	1.54±0.60
	PS	2.14±0.78	1.60±0.62	2.44±0.68	2.52±0.75	1.52±0.61	1.30±0.46	1.52±0.62	1.66±0.69
Right	PSD	1.96±0.76	1.80±0.71	2.83±0.82	2.53±0.71	1.29±0.46	1.31±0.45	1.63±0.69	1.46±0.55
	IL	1.93±0.78	1.67±0.61	2.73±0.75	2.29±0.53	1.25±0.48	1.29±0.46	1.65±0.61	1.34±0.38
	CDS	1.98±0.77	1.71±0.49	2.57±0.66	2.22±0.48	1.52±0.60	1.48±0.48	1.51±0.48	1.41±0.36
	CH	2.22±0.62	2.45±0.81	3.23±0.82	2.60±0.62	1.39±0.50	1.61±0.62	1.83±0.81	1.59±0.68
	F	1.220	12.021	9.578	1.324	2.244	3.983	2.690	2.080
	p	p=0.285	p<0.001	p<0.001	p=0.228	p=0.023	p<0.001	p=0.007	p=0.036

Source: self-made

Regarding belief in NVD, multiple comparison tests showed statistically significant differences between CH supporters and everyone else, with CH voters having higher average values. There are also significant differences between supporters of BE with CH (p <0.001), PSD (p <0.001), IL (p = 0.024); between PCP supporters and those who would vote for CH (p <0.001) and PSD (p = 0.010); between PS supporters with CH (p <0.001), PSD (p <0.001), IL (p = 0.044); PAN supporters with CH (p <0.001) and PSD (p = 0.004); voters in L and voters in CH (p <0.001). It should be noted that all the voters of the right-wing parties have higher values than the supporters of the left in terms of pro-right news.

Regarding the belief in pro-right fake news (FND) a similar behavior is observed. That is, CH supporters are significantly different from everyone else and also have higher average belief values. There are also significant differences between left-wing voters and right-wing voters: BE-CH (p <0.001), BE-PSD (p = 0.010); PCP-CH (p <0.001); PS-CH (p <0.001), PS-PSD (p = 0.013); PAN-CH (p <0.001), PAN-PSD (p = 0.013), L-CH (p <0.001). Finally, it is the voters of the right-wing parties who have the highest values.

Regarding the willingness to share content and the vote in each party, the multiple comparison tests show voter behavior similar to that verified concerning belief. Regarding the willingness to share pro-left fake news (SFNE), there are statistically significant differences between voters who voted for the PS with voters in PSD (p <0.001), PAN (p = 0.009), and IL (p = 0.019), and the voters of the PS have higher values.

Regarding the willingness to share pro-right fake news (SFND), there are significant differences between BE voters with CH voters (p <0.001) and CDS (p = 0.047); between PCP voters and CH supporters (p = 0.009); between people who voted for CDS and PAN voters (p = 0.040); between CH and L (p = 0.003), PS (p <0.001), PSD (p <0.001), PAN (p <0.001), and IL (p = 0.005). It should be noted that for SFND, all right-wing voters have significantly higher average values and CH voters have a greater willingness to share compared to all voters.

Regarding the will to share pro-left news (SNVE), we found significant differences between voters of the BE and those of the PSD (p = 0.047), PAN (p = 0.017), IL (p = 0.027); between PS voters and

supporters of PSD (p = 0.013), PAN (p = 0.006), and IL (p = 0.014), with BE and PS voters always showing higher values. Regarding the willingness to share pro-right news (SNVD), BE voters are significantly different from CH voters (p <0.001), PSD (p = 0.031); the supporters of the PCP, in turn of the CH (p = 0.006); and CH supporters differ significantly from all left party voters. Furthermore, there are differences between supporters of PSD and PAN (p = 0.028). In all cases related to SNVD, voters from right-wing parties have significantly higher values.

5.3. Association between self-placement on the left-right political scale, partisan sympathy, consumption, and dissemination of fake news

To study the association between (2) party sympathy, (3) participants' self-placement on the left-right political scale, belief, and willingness to share news and fake news, Pearson's linear correlation coefficient was used (Table 5).

Table 5. *Correlation between self-placement on the left-right scale, sympathy for the party, belief, and willingness to share news and fake news (Pearson's r)*

	Pro-left		Pro-right		Partisan sympathy		Self-placement scale L-R
	Fake News	News	Fake News	News	Right	Left	
Self-placement scale L-R	-0.018	-0.070	0.277**	0.271**	0.467**	-0.473**	-
SPD	0.018	-0.006	0.193**	0.264**	-	0.139**	0.467**
SPE	0.058	0.153**	-0.222**	-0.147**	0.139**	-	-0.473**
SFNE	0.558**	0.377**	0.362**	0.262**	0.067	0.180**	-0.052
SFND	0.366**	0.295**	0.628**	0.390**	0.206**	-0.052	0.194**
SNVE	0.307**	0.496**	0.232**	0.273**	0.031	0.216**	-0.098**
SNVD	0.212**	0.284**	0.361**	0.489**	0.248**	-0.004	0.172**

Source: self-made based on the questionnaire´s data.
Note: * $p < 0,05$, ** $p < 0,01$

According to Table 5, the results indicate several significant positive and negative correlations. It is important to highlight the associations between (2) the sympathy for the party and the belief in news and fake news. Sympathy for right-wing parties (SPD) is correlated with the belief in pro-right fake news ($r = 0.193$; p <0.001) and pro-right news ($r = 0.264$; p <0.001), while that sympathy for left-wing parties (SPE) is positively associated with pro-left news ($r = 0.153$; p <0.001) and negatively with belief in pro-right fake news ($r = -0.222$; p <0.001) and pro-right news ($r = -0.147$; p <0.001).

It should be noted that there are no significant correlations between the most supportive of left-wing parties and pro-left fake news. Regarding the propensity to share fake news, the results indicate that there is a positive correlation between voters with greater sympathy for left-wing parties and the desire to share pro-left content; and a positive correlation between supporters of right-wing parties and the willingness to share pro-right content. However, there are no significant associations between supporters of left-wing parties with the desire to share pro-right content and vice versa.

The (3) self-placement of respondents on the left-right political scale also shows a positive and significant correlation with partisan sympathy for the right ($r = 0.467$; p <0.001), with the willingness to share pro-right content (fake news: $r = 0.194$, p <0.001; and news: $r = 0.172$; p <0.001), and the belief in pro-right fake news ($r = 0.277$; p <0.001) and pro-right news ($r = 0.271$; p <0.001). On the

other hand, self-placement on the left-right scale tends to be contrary to the partisan sympathy of the left, with a negative correlation between the variables ($r = -0.473$; p <0.001). There is no significant correlation between self-placement on the political scale and belief in pro-left fake news and real news and the willingness to share pro-left fake news and real news. If we look at Table 6, we see the association between party sympathy, independently by party, with the belief and willingness to share news and fake news.

Table 6. *Correlation between party sympathy (by party) with belief and willingness to share news and fake news (Pearson's r)*

		FNE	FND	NVE	NVD	SFNE	SFND	SNVE	SNVD
Left-wing parties	PCP	0.083*	-0.103**	0.141**	-0.085	0.156**	0.022	0.168**	0.013
	BE	0.044	-0.190**	0.157**	-0.105**	0.159**	-0.039	0.215**	0.019
	PAN	-0.012	-0.195**	0.019	-0.148**	0.036	-0.093*	0.072	-0.065
	L	0.066	-0.140**	0.106**	-0.098	0.142**	-0.031	0.143**	-0.014
	PS	0.038	-0.184**	0.148**	-0.101**	0.176**	-0.044	0.199**	0.032
Right-wing parties	PSD	-0.032	0.078*	0.029	0.208**	0.059	0.141**	0.036	0.220**
	IL	-0.011	0.087*	-0.028	0.180**	0.034	0.112**	0.001	0.136**
	CDS	0.029	0.098**	-0.017	0.180**	0.040	0.122**	0.016	0.179**
	CH	0.070	0.312**	-0.007	0.212**	0.063	0.235**	0.038	0.235**

Note: * $p < 0,05$, ** $p < 0,01$

Source: self-made based on the questionnaire´s data.

According to Table 6, only partisan sympathy in the PCP has a positive correlation with the belief in pro-left fake news ($r = 0.083$; p = 0.026). On the other hand, the belief in pro-right fake news shows positive correlations with sympathy in all right-wing parties, highlighting the correlation with CH ($r = 0.312$; p <0.001) and negative correlations with pro-left partisan sympathy, revealing a contrary behavior. This trend can also be seen in the association of party sympathy with pro-right news, although not so explicitly. Regarding the association between the desire to share, there is a similar result, with supporters of left-wing parties with positive associations with SFNE and SNVE, and vice versa.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Our study aimed to analyze the relationship between partisanship, as motivated reasoning, and the belief and spread of political news and fake news. To assess this relationship, it was crucial to compare (1) voting intention, (2) partisan sympathy, and (3) self-placement on the left and right political scale with the measurement variables of belief and the participant's willingness to share content. Our results have shown that party identity influences how the electorate consumes disinformation. However, we see a greater tendency for right-wing party participants to accept fake news and news that confirms their beliefs. This trend was evidenced regarding the three measurement parameters of partisanship, in contrast to what was revealed with left-wing supporters since there were no significant differences between voting, self-positioning, and/or sympathizing with the left and believing in pro-left fake news. It is important to note that pro-left fake news did not present significant differences for any of the groups, but the pro-right fake news and news not only motivate a greater belief of right-wing voters but also seem to stimulate a significantly uneven attitude among left-wing voters. Left-wing supporters are not indifferent to pro-right fake news and news. Regarding the attitude of left-wing respondents towards right-wing content (news and fake news), we found that left-wing supporters do not tend to

believe in fake news in general, but are skeptical of news that is not compatible with their beliefs. Interestingly, the literature has shown, however, that it is conservatives (pro-right) who react most actively to threats or negative information (Fessler et al., 2017).

Compared with the results obtained by Baptista et al., (2021), we can confirm that partisanship, like political ideology, shows that people who belong to right-wing parties are more vulnerable to believing in fake news. However, Baptista et al., (2021) showed that conservative people and/or those who defend more right-wing social and cultural values believed and shared both pro-right and pro-left fake news. This contradicts the confirmation bias. However, the present study, unlike Baptista et al. (2021), showed that right-wing supporters are more likely to accept pro-right fake news, but not to accept pro-left fake news. Moreover, it reinforces the theory of confirmation bias by the fact that left-wing supporters tend to share pro-left content and right-wing supporters tend to share pro-right content. This was not shown in the previous study (Baptista et al., 2021), in which ideologically right-wing people were also more likely to share left-wing content. Therefore, with this research, we verify that party identity offers more predictable results and may be a better predictor than political ideology. Even so, these results do not coincide, in part, with most of the studies of the academic literature consulted, which point to partisan prejudice as a strong predictor of the belief in fake news compatible with each of the ideologies, both left and right-wing (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Ditto et al., 2019; Faragó et al., 2020; Fessler et al., 2017; Uscinski et al., 2016; Van Bavel and Pereira, 2018). However, left-wing supporters have revealed this trend regarding the willingness to share. Furthermore, left and right-wing supporters have always been antagonistic.

Even so, several studies recognize, from an ideological perspective, that conservatives are more likely to believe and spread fake news (Grinberg et al., 2019; Guess et al., 2019; Roets, 2017). Furthermore, since it is the anti-leftist and anti-governmental orientation [3] that dominates the provision of online disinformation in Portugal (Baptista and Gradim, 2020b; Cardoso et al., 2019a; Cardoso et al., 2019b), we can suggest that the results are in line with expectations. As happened in the US elections, in which everything indicates that fake news was created for a very specific audience (conservative/republican) (Grinberg et al., 2019; Guess et al., 2019), we can, thus, speculate that people from the right-wing political spectrum, also in Portugal, are more exposed to political fake news. It is known that repeated exposure can make fake news more credible (Pennycook and Rand, 2018), help correcting false information more difficult to accept (Shin and Thorson, 2017), especially by people with high levels of authoritarianism (Rollwage et al., 2018) (which may define some of the people who sympathize with CH). Gorman and Gorman (2016) argue that people enjoy "genuine pleasure" when they find information that confirms their beliefs, which can be the basis for the creation of filter bubbles and echo chambers.

When individually analyzing the data by party, the behavior of voters and supporters of the radical populist right party (Chega, CH) stands out compared to all the others. People who identify with CH have higher levels of belief and willingness to share news and fake news that favor the right-wing. Previous empirical evidence has emphasized the creation and spread of fake news in the realm of radical right, especially in Western democracies (Bennett and Livingston, 2018; Freelon et al., 2020). As we mentioned earlier, in Portugal, the Chega party also seems to be associated with the use of bots or fake profiles on social networks, imposing its ideology and discrediting political forces and figures of other parties through the use of satire, lies, and distortion of the truth, while directing attacks on journalists and traditional media (Carvalho, 2020b; Silva, 2020). Silva (2020) denounces how an "army" of fake profiles tries to impose Chega in a Portuguese region (Braga district), demonstrating how fake profiles are invading Facebook groups or communities that are not closely related with any political or ideological force, but that bring together thousands of members because they share the region or city where they reside. Furthermore, several journalistic research denounced the connections

of Chega's leaders with religious cults, in which pastors seek to mobilize their faithful to join the party (Carvalho, 2020a; Público, 2020), as happened in the United States with Donald Trump, with the ultra-conservative evangelical current approving his ideals and supporting his campaigns.

Finally, partisanship makes people more vulnerable to political fake news, shaping their attitudes and judgments according to their pre-existing beliefs. In Portugal, party identity has a greater influence on the right-wing electorate. In light of these results, we believe that online misinformation aimed primarily at this specific audience (anti-establishment and unsatisfied) could probably have a greater effect, although this influence has not been evaluated or studied.

Notes

[1] See https://bit.ly/36yG4gK (European Council)

[2] See https://poligrafo.sapo.pt

[3] Since 2015, the Socialist Party (PS) leads the government in Portugal.

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