

[Transcript] The News Agents / Europe's on fire - so why are politicians scared of green policies?

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

The smoke was covering the sun at this point, so there was this really scary orange hue of everything, and there was ash falling, and people were just carrying whatever belongings they had on them.

That was Robert Sladden, who should have been on holiday in Rhodes this week, celebrating his fourth wedding anniversary with his husband, Jordan.

He's speaking to us from Toulouse, and he's actually so grateful that he made it there.

He is, to all intents and purposes, an evacuee.

One of those many thousands who had to flee Rhodes, often in the middle of the night, or with very little notice, to trek across the beach, or to trek miles up a main road without having any sense of the direction in which they were going to escape the wildfires that are engulfing parts of the Greek island.

And it is extraordinary to look at the front of the times today, and to see many people like Robert fleeing one of the resorts with this extraordinary orange hue.

The sun has been masked by the burn and the fire smoke.

And on the right, we hear that 19,000 people are fleeing Rhodes, and on the left, the main headline is the Tory retreat from green policies in order to woo voters.

How on earth can we be looking at this picture, and these words, side by side, and simply not getting it?

Welcome to the News Agents.

The News Agents.

It's Emily.

And it's Lewis in Seville.

And later in the show, we're going to be talking about what was a really exciting, extraordinary election night here in Spain, where everybody thought, not just in Spain, but in Europe overall, that the right and the far right were about to enter government for the first time since 1975, since the fall of Franco's regime.

And the Spanish voters, well, it looks like they've had other ideas.

But we're going to start in Rhodes and Corfu and Evia for that matter, because the scenes there are thousands of Brits who are trying to leave.

They've actually become evacuees, almost refugees, in a very, very temporary way, whilst they have been running from wildfires on the islands as holidaymakers who thought they were just going for a weak sun.

And of course, the devastation will not long term affect many of the Brits.

It will affect those who live there, the Greeks, the locals, who have been unbelievably helpful, not just in what they've been handing out on the ground, but in the ferrying, in the taxiing of Brits and any foreigners, we assume, to get them out of these places, to get them to some safety or refuge.

And what is happening at the moment is, I think, what you might call a kind of cognitive dissonance, because we are looking at the pictures of people fleeing and knowing the devastation it's causing to those on these islands and many other parts, to be honest, of mainland Europe.

And here at home, we're arguing, still arguing, about whether green policies lost labour, the

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Uxbridge by-election, and whether this needs a reset in order to win back voters.

All that, all that political discussion is to come with Lewis in a moment.

But right now, we're going to speak to Robert Sladden, who should have been on holiday in Rhodes this week, should have been celebrating a wedding anniversary this week, and is actually speaking to us from Toulouse as an evacuee.

How are you feeling?

Quite shell-shocked, as I'm sure you can imagine.

I feel like today's the first day that the events are kind of really hitting home for me and my husband.

Last night was the first time we were able to kind of sleep safely in a bed and not be worried about kind of the fires or the next steps, what we were going to do to get out.

So, yeah, it's been quite an emotional couple of days, quite terrifying couple of days, and we just both feel incredibly relieved to have made a flight out and to be safe.

When did you first get told to move?

When did you first feel the signs of danger?

We only arrived on the Friday night to the hotel, and even then there was actually a little bit of kind of smoke in the distance, and I remember we were having drinks on the Friday night and there was some ash at the hotel.

But we asked the hotel staff and they said, you know, it's fine, we get fires sometimes, everything's okay.

We woke up on Saturday morning and had a very normal, you know, went for breakfast, the sun was out, went to the pool, everything was great.

Everyone started feeling a bit nervous, I'd say, about 12, because the plume of smoke behind the hotel had got a lot bigger, and there was a water on the helicopters collecting water flying over our hotel, and we could see it going to the sea and flying back.

So again, we kind of said to the staff, you know, is everything okay?

Should we be worried?

They were very much like, no, no, everything's absolutely fine, you know, anything will update you, but please don't worry.

So about two o'clock we went up to get lunch and we went to the reception again and just said, look, we are getting nervous, what do you think?

Everything's fine.

Grab some food.

I actually said to my husband, I think maybe, or he said to me, I think maybe we should pack up just in case, thinking, you know, worst case scenario they'll say to us in a couple of hours, it's a bit close, let's all get into coaches and they'll take us somewhere else.

So we'd started packing and we were about five minutes into that process, had a noise outside our door and we opened the door and we could see staff members running.

One of the cleaners came over to us, saw us, came over and said, you need to go run, run, you need to go right now.

So we just grabbed what we had and started running and we could see other holiday makers

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also with bags or whatever they had and just running.

We ran down to the beach and as we went down to the beach, we could see thousands of people streaming across this road at the beach.

We waited on the beach for a little bit and were given kind of water bottles and then people started leaving and we could really see the fires coming in at that point.

So we just grabbed our stuff and started hiking basically down the beach and it was 40 degree heat.

I mean, it looked apocalyptic because you know that the smoke was covering the sun at this point.

So there was this really scary orange hue of everything and there was ash falling and people were just carrying whatever belongings they had on them.

Many people had nothing.

Some people were still in just swim shorts or bikinis and flip-flops, carrying children, carrying babies.

Everybody was just doing the best they could to kind of hike up this road.

So yeah, we were on the beach for a while, then we moved on to the road.

We carried on that for a good couple of kilometers.

Some of the places as we were passing, a lot of the locals were just so compassionate and so helpful.

They would bring out water bottles to people.

They were bringing out hoses and trying to hose people down.

I mean, the heat was just unbelievable.

It was so, so hot and there was no shade considering that they must have been so scared for their own homes and their businesses and, you know, their livelihoods.

They were still looking after us.

They were still trying to help us.

So it sounds as if the locals were staying put.

Yeah, I think we could see that changing as we walked because we could see some people were packing up cars as we went along.

The really odd part was when we first were told to run, we were going past other resorts and we could see people looking out their rooms and sitting by pools, drinking beers, watching us walk past and kind of looking in shock about what's happening.

You know, and those resorts were all eventually evacuated, but it kind of went from zero to a hundred so quick.

There was no fire alarm.

Even went off in the hotel that we were staying at.

There was nothing like that.

So it was just suddenly get out and go.

Did you know which direction you were heading in?

No, we had no idea.

I mean, the thing is, it's so crazy now.

At first we grabbed our bags because I was like, well, they're going to put us on a bus surely.

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And then we're told to go to the beach.

But then from that point on, we didn't speak to any official anyone from the hotel, anybody.

We were completely on our own and the only reason we went the way we did is because everybody else was walking that way and the fire was behind us and the road behind us was blocked by the fire.

So we had no choice.

But the scary part was that the wind was blowing in the direction with us so the fire was very much following us.

You know, me and my husband said at one point, we were like, we could be on this road for hours like we don't know where we're going to go.

We then hitchhiked because we could still see the fire coming over the hill and both of us were like, we need to keep going.

We can't stop here.

So at that point, another local guy pulled over that people were getting on the back of trucks.

Getting people into trucks and just telling them to come with them, grabbing suitcases, anybody who could go in a car was just going.

So we got in another car.

We're driven to another town a couple of kilometers further up.

And there was no advice.

There was no one telling us what to do.

So again, we flagged down a van and actually this guy called Thanasis, who was a local Greek guy.

He pulled over, hit a truck, he pulled over and he was just so lovely.

He was like, look, get in my car, I'll take you where you guys need to go.

And he actually knew someone that owned this beach hotel.

The lady that owned it brought us in, gave us food, gave us drinks.

We had no money.

She was like, don't worry about it.

It just, you know, come and come in.

She said they had a room for the night.

It was around the first time I managed to get some reception, managed to get some phone reception.

So we were messaging our families.

I called the consulate and was like, what do we do?

They said, we have no update.

Just listened to the Greek authorities.

I tried to explain to them that there are no Greek authorities.

There's no one around.

And they said, if you feel safe, stay where you are.

And if you're on the beach, that's the best place to be.

And that's all they said.

At this point, we could see the fire still.

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I mean, it was much further away, but we could still see it.
How did you end up then in Toulouse?
It got to nightfall.
The fire looked a lot bigger.
People started getting scared.
The town before us, we found out, got evacuated.
More people are right.
Everyone who had cars started leaving.
So we were like, we need to go.
And then this other British family we met, they ran onto the road and actually flagged down one of the buses taking people back and forth.
And the bus driver just pulled over and said, get on the bus.
And we were driven to Clamiri, which is on the south end of the island.
The hotel staff were trying to look after people and give them little sandwiches if they could.
And we spent the night sleeping on a sun lounger.
I mean, it didn't really sleep.
We were kind of, there were hundreds of people just all around by the pool on sun loungers.
Worked up the next day.
We could see the smoke over us again.
There was ash falling on us again.
So we were all kind of like, we're in the same situation.
We need to get out here.
So in the end, for that day, we hung out for about five or six hours.
We were told to be registered, wait on a tennis court.
We did that for a bit.
But it became clear there was kind of no plan.
Eventually myself and my husband got into a bus to the airport.
And I mean, I was at that point, we both sat on this bus and we were driving away.
I think it just really like hit both of us that we were incredibly lucky to be getting out of there.
A friend from the UK, a friend John, actually booked us a flight out of there on EasyJet for us and sent us the details.
We were like, book the first place you can find and it was to lose in France.
And presumably this has cost you money.
We just found out that the insurance company we booked with said they're going to cover nothing.
They're giving us no money back.
According to them, we should have stayed in roads.
Our policy says that we should have booked a hotel within 20 miles of the place we had to leave.
They said that the FCO is still advising travel to roads, therefore it is fine to travel to roads and we shouldn't have left.

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Can I ask you, Robert, what you've, sounds a really weird question.

What have you learned from what you've been through?

I mean, I know you're still processing it.

One of the things that really stood out that was incredible was just the compassion of the locals.

The Greek locals were incredible.

They absolutely did anything they could to try and help people, giving them water, food, giving them lifts and just really trying to look after people.

And considering that this is their home, they're watching their home burn, their businesses, their livelihoods and they're still going out of their way to help people, help the tourists on the island.

To me, the humanity behind that is just incredible and something really amazing from the people of Greece.

I'd say for us, just to be honest, like climate change is something that's been scaring me for a long time and I think this is an example of, you know, the world is warming where nothing's been done to deal with it properly by governments, green policies have been stopped all the time and these kind of situations are waking people up a lot to the situation that we're in as a planet and that we're going to need to really start doing things differently.

As much as it was a scary situation and it's horrible, there was such an amazing amount of humanity that was shared by the people that were going through this and that's something really wonderful to see.

I can hear that in your story.

It sounds like the people who were around you were extraordinary but in terms of anything official, it was a complete disaster.

It was chaos is the word I would use and that is just the best way to describe it.

It was just chaos and, you know, I think a lot of people, we all quickly realized that we were on our own.

I mean, the whole couple of days, we're just working out what's our next steps, how safe are we, where we currently are and how do we get out of here if we have to get out of here.

Robert, listen, thank you so much for giving us your time and your story.

We hope you both get safely home.

Thank you so much.

To take us back to the politics here, I've been amazed really at the overcorrection over the course of the weekend.

It says a lot about why it is that the Labour Party has been in opposition for nearly all of its existence and why the Conservative Party has been in office for much of the last century and longer by the way that they've reacted to these by-elections.

It takes quite something for the Labour Party to basically bury one of the biggest electoral successes in its history, basically its biggest by-election or nearly the biggest by-election success against the Conservatives in its history, burying it by reacting in the way that they've done and the way that leadership has done over you layers, really, it's quite skillful in some ways.

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I mean, and the Conservatives to basically bury two enormous defeats and just move on and be able to just say nothing to see here is equally extraordinary.

I think you've got to look in the kind of Kremlinology of the Labour leadership on this. It's not just that the Labour Party's overreacting, it's as a result of the fact that there are factions around Keir Starmer, there are people around him who have long been very skeptical about the Green Agenda, who have long been skeptical about people like Ed Miliband who have been pushing it, who have long been worried about it being as Lyndon Crosby once called it a barnacle on the boat and are using the Uxbridge results to push some of this stuff away and to say, look, we've got to move away from this.

We can't go into an election with anything, as Keir Starmer said, which is quite extraordinary at the weekend at the National Policy Forum, with anything that the Conservative Party might put on leaflet after leaflet.

The problem with that, of course, is that almost anything would fail that criterion.

What about that commitment to bulldozer through planning regulations?

And as you say, the thing is actually, according to all of the polling, the public are committed and do want to see action from politicians on net zero and green issues and it would be a mistake, I think, for a progressive party, a leftist-centred party to just leave, to vacate this pitch.

Not least when you can see that there are political forces around the world, whether it's Biden's Democrats or Albanese in Australia, some extent social Democrats in Germany, who have used this agenda to give their own prospectus, their own platform for government, some real excitement and some real, a real sense of change and optimism.

Of course, it's not just the Labour Party that is considering their position on all things green.

It's also the Tories who, if you like, feel, in parts of their party, emboldened by the win in Uxbridge to say, thank God we can shovel these green issues under the table for another few years.

There's talks about the petrol and diesel ban, they're re-looking at green policies, which of those will actually last the course.

There are questions, and have been questions, we've asked on the news agents, about Rishi Sinek's own commitment to the green agenda.

And all you need is for people to start putting together, if you like, political weather and reshaping it to set their agenda in a way that can ignore climate change if they choose for another 10 years.

And I tell you something, Lewis, I don't know, I think you're probably too young to remember the chocolate game, but it was something that we played in the 80s, and it involves a blindfold and a knife and fork, and it's a kid's party game and you have to roll the six, and as soon as you get a six, you get to put the blindfold on and carve as much chocolate as you can until the next person throws the six.

And there is something about the way our politics happens in this country, which is that every party responds as if they've just got the knife and fork and the blindfold and the chocolate.

And they have to do things because it's all going to end when somebody throws the six.

And we have no sense of strategy and no sense of planning and no sense of collaboration,

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most importantly, to actually see any of these things through.

And climate change is not something that can fit into a five-year plan.

So either we're committing to net zero or we're not, but you can't just shift your whole pattern on the result of one by-election and 459 votes.

Yeah, and also, in terms of the Labour perspective, remember that, yeah, they lost what, as you say, 450 votes.

I mean, the Greens got nearly 1,000 votes.

Who is to say the Labour Party chose to go into that election or that by-election week having an argument about two-char benefit policy, it's looked pretty disunited.

I mean, who's to say that it wasn't those 1,000 Green Party voters who are themselves sending a message about what they thought about the way the Labour Party was acting?

So you can look at it in different ways.

I also think that what we are seeing, though, is that this could be a glimmer of the politics to come in the sense that Britain has enjoyed, as opposed to the US, for example, it has enjoyed a bit more of a consensus between the two main parties on climate change and net zero.

There's no comparison to say the Democrats and the Republicans in America.

But of course, that's been quite an easy kind of consensus to have up to now, because up to now, the way the government, successive Conservative governments have been approaching this, has been to set targets.

It's just said, we'll do this by 2030, we'll be carbon neutral by 2050, we'll get rid of petrol and diesel car sales by 2030, and so on.

So it's really easy, right, to have targets.

It's really easy to say, this is where we'll be by then.

It gets harder when you're saying, and this is how we're going to get there.

And I do think the politics of the last part of this decade is increasingly going to be about how we get there.

But I don't think the answer for the Labour Party, or for the Conservative Party, for that matter, is therefore just to say, oh, I think this is really hard, let's retreat from it.

Because it is ultimately, it is not just about the environment, it is not just about climate change, it's about the economy.

It's about a global race for these industries of the future.

And for the British state to just retreat from that, because they're a little bit afraid of potential pushback from a pretty limited set of places, would be a mistake.

This morning there was a poll clip with the Prime Minister, and Rishi Sunak is here.

I mean, just listen to the words he uses, talking about not wanting to hassle families, hassle families with concerns over net zero at a time of cost of living.

I'm also cognisant that we're living through a time at the moment where inflation is high.

That's having an impact on household and families' bills, and I don't want to do anything to add to that.

So yes, we're going to make progress towards net zero, but we're going to do that in a proportionate and pragmatic way that doesn't unnecessarily give people more hassle and

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more cost in their life.

That's what I'm not interested in prepared to do.

But we are making progress towards net zero.

Our track record on this is better than the vast majority of other countries that we're compared to.

So people should be proud of that, but also should be reassured that what I'm not going to do is unnecessarily add cost to their families' bills.

So not going to unnecessarily add cost.

Well, let's speak to Emma Pinchbeck, the CEO of Energy UK, which really helps businesses to transition into a net zero or sort of climate change aware model.

And Emma, I'm wondering how you're helping them navigate right now.

It's important to note that I actually represent the energy sector, including the incumbents, right?

So I've got everything from gas right through to renewables and nuclear and electric vehicle installers and heating installers and all of the weird and wonderful bits of the energy sector.

And for the energy sector, net zero is just another industrial revolution.

We've been through a change from coal to then oil and gas.

And the change from oil and gas to renewables led economies is for us a massive, exciting, challenging economic opportunity.

And so when we hear net zero being talked about in such a political way, the biggest worry is actually the damage that does to the investment signal for what us is really industrial policy.

Do you think it is being talked about in a political way?

I mean, are we over worrying about a change of direction from ministers who are actually saying, no, we are carrying on, nothing's changed?

It's remarkable how much noise there is on net zero policy after the results of the elections last week.

And that tells you that certainly in Westminster, in the UK, there are some politicians that think of this as a political issue.

And we worry about that only because we have in the past responded to that politics and made decisions about our energy policy that have been costly, right?

So in 2015, in the UK, in the run up to a challenging political period, there was some pressure on green policies, which the then Prime Minister responded to by cutting on potential wind and energy efficiency.

You remember the kind of infamous cut the green crap period.

And we know now that that basically ruled out the cheapest form of energy infrastructure and reduced our energy efficiency programs.

And now we've had a global gas prices.

So every house in the UK has ended up spending a couple of hundred quid extra on their bill because of that decision.

And it's held back our ability as a sector to invest in your world leading technologies here and the cheapest form of power that we need to provide secure, cheaper, affordable

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energy to the economy.

Do you feel the same way with you, Les?

Or do you think that's just a policy that Labour's mayor in London has got wrong?

They're different.

It is, for example, not something that I work on because it is not part of energy policy.

It's not part of how we see the wider net zero shift.

It was policy designed largely with air quality in mind.

And to that end, I think it is being conflated with a wider environmental or green agenda.

And I think that is unhelpful based on where we're at in the energy sector at the moment, which is facing, if anything, massive increased global competition and interest in things like renewables and energy efficiency and clean technology, because we've all just lived through a gas crisis.

OK, well, let me just ask you then on Labour's direct policy about the £28 billion, which sounded like a firm commitment, you know, a year or so ago, and now sounds like it's wavering, or at least it won't be a financial commitment.

Do you understand that from Labour or do you think that's kind of crazy?

Any government that gets in when we have our general election next year will want to be backing net zero and want to be investing in it for the simple reason that they're in competition with the US, with China, with India and with Europe, who've all just increased the amount of money that they're putting into these technologies and solutions.

And you can call it what you like.

I mean, I call it industrial strategy at the moment, as much as I call it net zero.

The point is there is no government that's going to want to be walking away from these technologies because they are the solution to things like, you know, Russian posturing on gas. They are the solution to things like jobs and productivity.

So you're just saying get on with it.

Yeah, we absolutely are.

In fact, we're saying not just get on with it, but go faster.

It's important to understand that most of the investment here is going to come from the private sector. You know, 75% of the investment for net zero is going to be the job of business.

And a lot of what is in our way is not in fact the money, it's things like planning reform or grid connections or kind of bread and butter bureaucracy.

And you're going to need a government to grasp some of these challenges by the neck and tackle them. And what worries me is any signal sent to our investors right now that governments are not serious about this, maybe was fine 10 years ago when we were somewhat in the lead.

But every other country with half a sense is investing very, very quickly in these technologies.

And I'm already seeing money move out of the UK into other markets.

So I want these technologies here, they're the right thing to do for the planet.

But also more importantly, they're the power behind the future economy.

And we need to be very, very serious about that.

And I would like that to be the political discussion.

So what is the next, let's say 12, 15 months going to look like?

Because we've got a conservative government possibly retreating from green policies because

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they think, you know, wrongly or rightly, it's landed them a by-election when they weren't expecting. And we've got what seems to be a Labour Party also cowed from what they see as their failure to secure a seat that they should have won, think they should have won. And presumably a kind of stasis as a result of that on anything that moves net zero or climate change measures forward.

We weren't expecting massive amounts of new policy from the present government before the general election. There are two things that we are expecting. Firstly, the Chancellor has promised a response to the US Inflation Reduction Act. And it's important that we get something this autumn. The second thing is signalling. There is competition for our technology, for our jobs, for our industry, from other markets. And I think governments always underestimate how quickly investors respond to those signals from political leaders. And so both the opposition and government, if they want this investment to stay in this country need to be very, very publicly supportive of the transition. And for me, what do I want? Planning reform would be nice. We've got an energy bill going through Parliament as well in the autumn. And so some of that stuff to do with grid and planning and the non-financial barriers to development would be really helpful. And in terms of the investment, we've got a £64 billion gap between now and 2030 for the amount of money we need to put into the renewable sector. Some of that is private. Some of it is the state of our auctions. And we are looking for a response from the Chancellor.

So whatever the political fight, whatever the framing of the general election, there are serious economic decisions to be made. And I would expect to see a Chancellor and shadow Chancellor taking

those very seriously between now and, let's say, the end of next year. Emma, thanks so much. Really good to talk to you. You're welcome. What was really interesting in what you just heard from Emma was that she continually reinforced the focus on economy. I mean, not green issue, not climate issues, but the sense that we have that economic advantage, and we could lose it. And it's a race. So you cannot care if you want to about climate change. I mean, it seems inconceivable, but you could not care about climate change and still see the economic case that has to be made right now for doing what the whole developing world is trying to do.

Emily, I think what's really interesting, we obviously started talking about the kind of pushback for Stammer and hinted about Sunak as well and where it leaves the right, the politics of net zero. Look, obviously, Sunak is coming under huge pressure from his right, not least because, you know what, anti-environment, anti-net zero, it's not a particularly attractive agenda in lots of ways, particularly for Britain's long-term future, but it is at least an agenda. And for a party which is increasingly kind of exhausted and sort of searching around for any sort of narrative that might tie the Sunak premiership together and tie the next general election together, it is there. And we've seen glimmers of that already with being just up oil, connecting that with a Labour Party in a pretty artificial, spurious way, also talking about North Sea Oil and Gas Extraction and Stammer's policy on that. But there is a danger as well. There is a danger for Sunak. And in a way, actually, funnily enough, we've seen that to some extent play out from Spain, where I am now in the Spanish General Election last night, which is that you have the mainstream PP, the equivalent of the British Conservatives, the Partido Popular, basically getting quite close and adopting some of the language and policy and rhetoric of the far-right Vox party,

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particularly with regards to climate change and net zero. And guess what? They've done pretty well in the election, but they haven't done nearly as well as they might have done. And part of that commentator is saying in Spain and Madrid and elsewhere this morning is partly because, particularly

with everything going on in Southern Europe right now, and the battle over weather and climate and extreme conditions, actually voters weren't particularly keen on that. And they did want to see reaction. So Sunak has to be careful about which way he's looking and potentially splitting part of his coalition. Anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself because we are going to have more on that and the breakdown of the election, what it means for Spain, what it means for Europe, and right-wing parties across Europe in particular, right after this.

Welcome back and we're heading to Spain and Lewis is there for us because many people I think were expecting a very different outcome to the elections last night than the one that we've now got. And that was the reemergence of Vox as a major player, a major political player, possibly even in government with a right-wing coalition. Vox being the party of the far right in Spain, which was expected to be if you like the kingmakers for the opposition. And last night something extraordinary happened, which is that Vox instead of soaring to electoral success or to being the kingmaker saw their share of the vote drop pretty considerably. They only got 33 seats in the end down from more than 50. And this was a moment where suddenly the socialists under Pedro

Sanchez started to see a way back to power. And right now there is a deadlock, there is a stalemate. I think it's fair to say that Spain is not unused to this sort of thing. They've had an election that ended in cellmates in 2016 and 2019. So the poor Spaniards could be going to the polls again as soon as December, you know, think of poor old Brenda from Bristol and what she would be thinking,

her Spanish equivalent, who's just done this once too many times. You're joking, not another one. But it raises really interesting questions now about the power of the right in Spain.

And if you like to extrapolate the power of right wing fringe parties, more widely in Europe, clearly we've got Giorgio Malone in Italy, who is in power. If you look further afield the Middle East and you've got Netanyahu, you can see a man who is sitting in power with the help of right wing extremists. That is part of his coalition. But it's not looking like it will be the story of Spain tonight. And possibly that's because Spain's economy is superb. I mean, it's actually quite functioning. The inflation rate is down to 2% the kind of rate that we all dream of here. So does economy now play a much bigger role than the kind of cultural issues that the right were trying to fight the selection on? And Lewis is the man to tell us.

Yeah, I mean, I'm just trying to think about who the equivalent of Brenda from Bristol would be, Bianca from Barcelona, right? Look, Spain has woken up this morning. They can't believe it. This was supposed to be every single poll, although they tightened a bit and you don't do polls in the last few days by law, but every poll leading up to selection was showing a slam dunk victory for Padilla Popular, PP, the mainstream conservative party, plus Vox, the far right party.

And now instead, there is an electoral deadlock with both blocks basically on around 170 seats apiece. And he did 176 to get a majority. And Pedro Sanchez, the socialist prime minister, gambled because he had terrible election results, regional election results, a few months ago,

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plunged this country into a snap election in summer. And there's a very good reason they don't do elections in summer in this country. And so building up right now, it's north of 40 degrees. But the gamble for him has paid off. And the socialists now believe that they have achieved an historic victory in stemming the flow of what they call fascism. Of course, Emily, in this country, of all European countries, fascism has a particular modern resonance when you consider that, of course, the Franco regime did not fall until his death in 1975. This is still such a young democracy. So we thought we would come out here, see how this result would play out, and we started the night in Vox HQ, which tells you something, in central Seville. And it's fair to say, as I say, that the night ended rather differently to how it began. Just listen to this piece here. So we're standing outside Vox HQ in central Seville. And it is a pretty unassuming tower block. They've got the third floor. To be honest, the lobby isn't the most fragrant building that I've ever been in. But on the outside is a banner which says we're ending 40 years of socialism. And by that, they sort of mean not just the Socialist Party, but the kind of cosy duopoly of Spanish politics between centre left and centre right. And this far right party has risen across the Spanish regions and is now in government in a whole host of them, majoring on cultural issues and immigration. But tonight is their big chance to make it to the big time. And their leader, Pedro Abascal, might enter government, perhaps as deputy prime minister. So because it's Spain, nothing happens until late. And people are starting to sort of stream in to Vox HQ. And they have this video that they were playing. They were playing the election night coverage from one of the main channels. But apparently they don't really trust journalists or trust mainstream media publications. So they've turned it over to their own bespoke election YouTube channel, which is currently playing, among other things, messages from George Maloney, Italian prime minister, far right prime minister, Victor Orban, far right Hungarian prime minister, Moraviecki, far right prime minister, Poland. And it is a reminder of the extent to which there is this family of European, let's call them ultra conservatives at this point now. And this place also is full of little leaflets and posters, which again talks in the language of that stuff, right. There's a massive poster talking about schooling here and schooling in Andaluthia, and it's saying stop indoctrination, stop LGBT campaigns, stop inclusive language, stop compulsory vaccinations. And you could transplant that to any party like this across almost any part of Europe now. And it would say exactly the same thing. There has been this development of this cultural agenda that is now permeating across European politics. And by the way, that would include our own British Conservative party. So after a while, we got talking to some of the activists at Vox, young, a lot of them actually, many in their twenties all having a cigarette and a beer on the balcony. And the things they speak about do advert to those darker cultural forces driving not just Spanish, but European politics, especially on the right. So Pablo, why, why do you join Vox? It's easy. It's the common sense of the economical part of Spain. I don't think that they are like really right. They are just common. You're 22. Yeah. On what, why are you part of Vox? I'm proud of Vox because I think we need like politics that supports people in the countryside, industry, energy. Me as an engineer, I'm so, so sad that I cannot live here in Spain because we don't have support enough to grow a business to start. Like it's impossible because of taxes, as my partner said. So I'm so sad about that. And we are scared about our females, about our girls, about being stalled in the round. It's so, so scary. What are you when you say about scared about women and girls? What are you scared about?

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Because illegal immigration normally comes from Africa. They have other social thinking about. So they have like, women are nothing for them. So they, they want to like, life like there. So we mean nothing. So we've just been standing on the balcony recording a little intro to the episode, which is about how the right are going to enter power. And our friend Grimo, our fixer here, was just bounded into the balcony with the latest projections. Grimo, what are they saying? Well, right now it's not so sure that Pepe is going to win the elections. Right now Pedro Sánchez maybe can set a government with Sumar, the far left party, let's say, because her leader, Jolanda Diaz, used to be from the Communist Party in Spain. So after all of this, and all of the chatter and the attention about Vox and the far right entering government in Spain, it could well be that the socialists win after all, maybe as a result of the fear about Vox. Yeah, probably. Well, if Vox enters a government, according to socialists, it's what's going to be like coming back to the 70s in Spain. To Franco. Yeah, to Franco, yes. 9.34, I'll get right back to your calls, but Luis Goodall, LBC's Luis Goodall joins us from Spain to give us an update on the Spanish election. The polls closed at 7. Any advance, any exit polling on whether the far right might enter government? Well, so there are projections, they're not quite exit polls. There were projections at the start of the night which showed that the PP, the Partido Popular, the equivalent of the Conservative Party, would have enough seats with Vox, the far right party, to form a government. This place, Pedro Sánchez, is socialist government, but it looks like actually, as the actual results have come in, that it's going to be an absolute nail biter and the Spanish socialists are doing better than many people, indeed, the initial projections thought that they would. I suspect partly out of fear of the far right and the Vox party, Pedro Sánchez had made an appeal to young voters in particular not to allow the ghost of Franco back into Spain, and now it looks as if there literally could be a couple of seats in it with about 25% of the seats still to come in. And will we see some sort of coalition? It looks like there will probably have to be some sort of coalition, which actually would only be the second coalition in Spain's history after the first one, which wasn't very popular, and it looks like Vox will actually go backwards here, but the idea, the specter of a far right party with pretty choice views on immigration, on women's rights, on LGBT rights, all of these sorts of different things has certainly scared Liberal Spain, and it looks like in the results, given that they're going to be closer than anyone thought, it looks like that's manifested in the results. So we decided to leave the Vox party because it was starting to feel a little bit sad, and we have hot footed it across town into the HQ of the Spanish socialist PSOE here in Seville, and it's buoyant, it's jubilant, completely against the odds, because 96% of the votes are in, as we record this at just coming up to midnight, and PP and Vox do not have a majority. Pedro Sánchez's gamble appears to have paid off. What that results in is another question, but it certainly isn't a coronation of the Spanish right. Pedro Sánchez has broken the expectation set out by the media, despite personal attacks on him, and he's come out and broken the false reality that they set out, which doesn't align with what Spanish people actually think in their own minds. The message set out by the far right has lost. The systematic lies that the right put out in order to destabilize Spain and the Spanish people reacted, and they decided that they wanted to put an end to this. You will be absolutely astonished to hear that we have retreated,

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with the Socialists, to the bar around the corner, and it's one o'clock in the morning now, and 99.5% of the results are in, and they are all celebrating here, and like they've got a good reason to be, as I was saying before, they've actually now had, we can see, their best results since 2008, the Spanish Socialists, in an election that was supposed to be, that everyone said, would be a disaster, a catastrophe, but they haven't won, and they're not celebrating victory, they've not celebrating something they've achieved as such, but rather something that they think they've stopped. But we'll see what tomorrow brings.

So as they say, it's the manganese after the notch-aid before. Spain is waking up to a surprise result and a result which is what one form of uncertainty for another, from a hard-working, government, perhaps to no government, or a left-wing government dependent on tiny nationalist parties, including Carlos Pujaman. How's that for a callback? Remember him? The leader of one of the Catalan separatist parties, actually still in exile at the moment, in Belgium, is not allowed to step foot in Spain.

Although this is a setback for the far-right, they are probably not going anywhere, and actually, although they'll be out of government, and although they may not enter government, with a prospect of a weak left-wing administration dependent on those regional nationalist MPs, they might be able to just buy their time.

This morning I caught up with Sergio Pérez Castaños, political scientist and professor at Burgos University.

Isn't it true, professor, that for all of the attention on Vox and the rise of the far-right and the fragmentation around Spanish politics, isn't this an election really about the resumption of all normality in Spanish politics, in a way?

The two parties, the socialists and the PP, have regained their place as the main blocks of Spanish politics, and they're growing in strength, so in a way that this is a return to the status quo ante. Well, yes, we had at least three different political parties that grew since these movements, these 15M and the Indignados movement in Spain, and what they proved is that when they get into government, they are no different from the traditional parties.

So, what's there to vote for them? If I was a former voter of the Socialist Party and I voted for Podemos in the previous elections and when they were in government, they acted exactly the same as the Socialist Party, so why should I keep on voting this political party when I can vote Socialist Party and be exactly the same?

But Vox is a different thing. Vox is growing as the far-right is growing in the rest of Europe, and they represent some kind of elements that are not present in other political parties, and is this anti-immigration policies, is this ultranationalist, and I think it's the most important thing, ultracatholicism, which is something that is not present in any other political party.

The way they defend families, traditional values is totally entangled with the Catholicism, and is something that comes from the dictatorship.

And finally, I mean, just on Vox then, do you think that they are now a spent force, or do you think that they still have the potential to be powerful in the future and that they could grow again and have more influence over Spanish politics?

They are here to stay. They are a crucial element in Spanish politics in every regional government. If they are not in government, at least they are sending strong vibes to the PP on what they should legislate and how they should spend the money.

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So I think they are here to stay, but I also think that when these kind of parties go into power, it's very difficult to keep on with this community agenda in which they just shout and shout and speak louder than the rest, and they don't propose anything, because when you are in government you have to govern.

This may have an effect on the electoral turnout. So I think they are here to stay for sure, but they are going to move from a 10% to a 15%, and they will be at least the next four years, they are going to be a force to look into and to take into account.

So the ghost of Franco is left in his grave, at least for now, but remember this is a young democracy, not 45 years old yet. It's one like Britain where the centre and the periphery are constantly pushing each other, consistently clashing, straining to see how far the other can go.

The two Spanish nationalisms, that of the strong centre, epitomised by someone like Franco, and that of its regions, straining at the leash, are the crucible of that historic clash.

This election result, where there will be a weak centre, small regional parties in the driving seat will do little to make it any better, and Vox will still be waiting in the wings.

Well, yeah, it was a really fascinating night, Emily. The thing overall that I felt about it, as well as the voters reminding us, all of us journalists, commentators, pundits, whatever you want to call us, soothsayers, that we should never assume what's going to happen any more in politics, because across the west now it's far too volatile.

There are lots of people who are just looking for yet another extension of the narrative of the far right on the rise, you know, we've seen it in Sweden, we've seen it in Italy, in Israel, etc.

U.S. under Trump, and so on. And it's much more patchy, it's much more complicated than that.

Different countries have their own separate politics and different dynamics of where they are in the electoral cycle.

And look, the socialists and the wider left parties have shown that they can put up what they call a cordon sanitaire, a Spanish equivalent of the French sort of Republican front, and they've done that successfully.

It's also true to say, though, that one thing that does unite all of these politics is their priorities, their focus, the things that they talk about is remarkably similar.

And whether that's, as I was saying in the package there, about a focus on LGBT issues, a focus on trans issues, a focus on immigration and so on.

So many of the phrases and the moors and the memes of the far right have become so mainstream. They have become internalised by centre-right parties right across Europe.

The centre-right is completely unrecognisable in most European countries now. And I've seen on Twitter this morning a few sort of, you know, in the classic sort of British exceptionalism kind of way, a few people on the right and British politics sort of congratulating ourselves saying, ah, well, Britain is one country without the far right.

I mean, look, actually not all of it by any means, but a lot of this, these sorts of narratives and these sorts of phrases and language, they've been completely internalised by the British Conservative Party.

And not all of it, as I say by any means, but some of it is the stuff that Rishi Sunak talks about, whether that's sort of the war on woke or war on cultural, on sort of what they say is, you know, erasing our history and so on and so forth.

So the way that so much of this previously pretty fringe rhetoric has become normalised on the

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centre-right, I think, should continue to astonish us.

I think it's also important to remember that this is not just a story of the right or the extreme right or the fringe groups that actually haven't made it into power.

There is also going to be a focus on the potentially pivotal role that hardline separatist parties like Together for Catalonia now play in any future government if Pedro Sanchez pulls them in, because Spain is about to take on the EU presidency.

And if there's one thing we know the EU is terrified of, it's separatist groups that threaten the fabric of the national country.

And, you know, we're old enough to remember, it wasn't so long ago, that the Catalan party separatist staged a referendum, you know, a unilateral referendum.

They all had to actually take exile in Brussels because it upset the main government of the day so much.

And now, not only have you had, if you like, on the past Podemos, who's, you know, a very left-wing party coming into the mainstream sort of socialist government,

but you've also got now to contemplate what Spanish government that includes separatist parties looks like,

and just what kind of message that will send out as it's starting its hold on the presidency.

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back. Well, the dust is settling on the Spanish election.

But of course, there are other issues going on in Spain right now which go way beyond the Spanish electoral process and Spanish politics.

And one of them, of course, and we've already been talking about it in a way on the show today, affecting virtually all of Southern Europe right now,

is climate change and the effects of climate change on this region, which is, in some ways, in some parts of this region, life is definitely being pushed to its limits.

And we are going to be reporting tomorrow from part of Spain where that is most definitely true.

We'll be back with you then. Bye for now.

Adios.

This has been a global player original podcast and a Persephoneka production.