

ANALYSIS

Regional and municipal elections: A defeat for conservatives in Spain

Tuesday 2 June 2015, by [GARÍ Manuel](#) (Date first published: 25 May 2015).

Presentation

Regional and municipal elections held at the end of May handed Spain's two largest parties—the conservative Popular Party and the increasingly neoliberal Socialist Party—their biggest losses since the end of the fascist dictatorship in 1978.

The backdrop to the election results is the dire economic conditions in Spain since the 2008-09 economic crisis. Unemployment is still nearly 24 percent, and after years of slump, the European Union's fourth-largest economy is growing at less than 1 percent per year. In May 2011, millions of people—known as the “Indignados”—occupied public spaces across the country. These mobilizations are the source of the new political party Podemos (We Can), which within months of its founding had disrupted Spain's historically stable two-party system. Hundreds of thousands of people have joined the party, which enjoys the support of more than 25 percent of voters in opinion polls.

Alongside Podemos, the Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP) (Popular Unity Candidates in English) in the autonomous region of Catalonia saw its support grow dramatically in May's elections. The CUP's base includes local ecological, housing and education movements and left-wing supporters of Catalán independence.

After a debate, Podemos decided against fielding its own candidates for all seats in the election, instead choosing to support left-wing candidates in some areas and backing its own activists in others. In order to blunt the upsurge on the left, several Spanish corporations financed a so-called Citizen Party (Ciudadanos) on the right in a blatant attempt to divert the “throw the bums out” sentiment into safe channels. Nonetheless, the combined showing of Podemos and CUP foretells a significant challenge to the two mainstream parties in national elections at the end of the year.

In an article written in the immediate aftermath of the election, Manuel Garí, a union activist and leading member of the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state, explained the backdrop to the vote. Garí serves on the editorial board of VientoSur.info, a left-wing Spanish language news and analysis site where this article originally appeared [[1](#)].

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“The two-party system has suffered a severe blow”

ON SUNDAY, May 24, elections were held in 9,000 municipalities in the Spanish state, 13 autonomous regions (not including Andalucía, Galicia, Catalonia and Basque Country), in the Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa provinces, and the provincial councils for the seven Canary Islands and for the three Balears Islands.

The day's most important fact is that the conservative Popular Party (PP), even though it came in first overall with 6 million votes, lost 2.5 million votes compared to the previous municipal elections, only beating the Socialist Party (PSOE) by 400,000 votes. The PSOE itself lost 775,000 compared to previous local elections—all this despite a significant increase in voter participation.

The second critical fact is that the two-party system, which served as the political model of the regime created in 1978 after the collapse of Franco's fascist government, has suffered a severe blow with the two main parties garnering barely 50 percent of the vote between them.

The third key element is the forceful emergence of the Popular Unity Candidates (CUP), which, with the support of Podemos, enjoyed excellent results not only in Barcelona and Madrid, but also in the city of Cádiz and others. And the success of the self-described Tides (Mareas) of local peoples' movements in Galicia put in doubt in many big cities the conservative monopoly under the auspices of the right-wing Convergence and Unity (CiU) in Barcelona or the PP elsewhere.

The fourth point is that Podemos' vote in the autonomous regions' elections was strong, so it will get representatives in most of the autonomous parliaments. However, its results fell below the expectations of many on the left, meaning that it only succeeded in becoming the third-strongest force in the best of its results.

For its part, the center-right Ciudadanos (Citizens), which was an alternative created by the boards of directors of various large corporations, aimed at regenerating the regime's popular base, did not draw the level of support it had hoped for. Finally, it's important to note that the United Left (IU) lost all its representatives in the autonomous regional parliaments except for Asturias and Aragón, marking an unprecedented disaster and revealing that its voters have been absorbed by Podemos.

In terms of institutional political power, the setback for PP is even greater than is apparent from merely counting up its votes. The PP lost its absolute majority in Cantabria, Castilla-La Mancha and the autonomous communities of Valencia and Madrid; and its governments in Aragón, Extremadura and Balears will not be returning to power. As of now, it will hold on to power in La Rioja and Murcia, but it is not certain to hang on in Castilla León.

In the municipal elections, with 94.5 percent of the votes counted in Barcelona, Ada Colau is the mayor-elect of Barcelona, as the candidate for the Podemos-backed anti-eviction Platform for People Affected by Mortgages, which won 11 council seats, ahead of 10 won by the conservative nationalists in CiU, five for Ciudadanos, and four for the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC), which received the lowest vote in its history.

In Madrid, with 99.51 percent of votes tallied, Esperanza Aguirre (PP) won 21 councilors compared to 20 won by Podemos-supported Manuela Carmena, meaning that the PP's Aguirre will not be able to govern because the PSOE also won nine seats, putting the right in a minority on the city council.

In Cádiz, Kichi González, a member of the Anticapitalists—a current of revolutionary socialist activists who are members of Podemos—headed a ticket which won eight seats, compared to 10 for Teófila Martínez of the PP, which lost its absolute majority for the first time in decades. Likewise in

Coruña and Santiago de Compostela, the Tides movement on the Atlantic coast has placed Alberto Núñez Feijó's future in doubt as a possible successor to Mariano Rajoy as PP party leader.

ATTEMPTING TO spin the results, Pedro Sánchez, PSOE leader, argued that the elections "are the beginning of the end for Mariano Rajoy as Prime Minister." What Sanchez didn't mention is which direction the country is headed in order to make this change. His project remains strictly neoliberal. So it's no wonder this socialist candidate who hopes to replace Rajoy also voted for the reform of Article 135 of the Constitution, giving precedence to paying off debt over social spending.

Sánchez is wrong if he believes the process underway will end with a simple swing from one of the dynastic parties to the other. The defeat of the PP represents the rejection of social spending cuts and attacks on democratic rights that have pushed the majority of the working population into impoverishment while the elites enrich themselves, making Spain the most unequal society in the European Union.

In these elections, wherever Podemos and the Popular Unity Candidates (CUP) decided to field candidates, they have transformed them into political tools that allowed the people to express themselves and the working classes to have political representatives—this transformation will continue to advance. The ballot boxes sent an unmistakable message: throw the PP out of all levels of government. Yet Podemos and the CUP must find a way to guarantee that the change deepens, developing towards a democratic rupture, in order to prevent the PSOE from merely giving the old regime a cosmetic makeover.

In order to accomplish this, Podemos and the CUP must not allow the PP to govern. Instead, they should carry out joint efforts, alongside community and popular organizations, to mobilize the people, to continue programmatic and strategic debates for future plans, and to facilitate the active participation of the citizens in all public matters through the creation of new forms of popular decision-making linked together at the municipal and autonomous regional level.

As set out in the Anticapitalists Special Communiqué on May 24:

"Now is the time to open up a massive and democratic debate within the popular movement in order to win the upcoming national elections. We must continue expanding and organizing the surge for change with open assemblies in every corner of the Spanish State. Popular unity, a radical rupture with the governing logic of austerity, a big wager on letting the people participate in all the decisions to come, including any electoral agreements, this is the way to win."

This is the central task for all anticapitalists in the Spanish state today.

Manuel Garí

P.S.

* <http://socialistworker.org/2015/06/01/a-defeat-for-conservatives-in-spain>

* Translated by Todd Chretien.

Footnotes

[1] <http://vientosur.info/spip.php?article10118>