European Elections Monitor

Spain remains ingovernable more than ever before

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Results

Outgoing Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez lost his wager: although the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) once again came out ahead in the parliamentary elections on 10th November in Spain with 28% of the vote, it has lost ground however in comparison with the previous election on 28th April. The Socialists won 120 seats, (-3). Moreover, their potential left-wing allies, (Unidas Podemos, led by Pablo Iglesias, United Left (IU) and Equo), have emerged weakened from the election, winning 12.84% of the vote and 35 seats (- 7).

The decline of the PSOE is even clearer in the Senate, since it took 92 seats in the upper house, of the Cortes Generales, i.e. 31 fewer in comparison with 28th April last.

On the right the People's Party (PP) led by Pablo Casado, recovered after having achieved the weakest result in its history in April. It won 20.82% of the vote and 88 seats (+22). Ciudadanos (C's), a centrist party led by Alberto Rivera, floundered in this election. It suffered a clear defeat taking 6.79% of the vote and 10 seats (- 47).

The event in this election is the breakthrough made by Vox, a populist right-wing party that emerged from the scission of the PP; it is led by Santiago Abascal, and won 15.09% of the vote and 52 seats (+ 28), thereby becoming Spain's third biggest party. "*Eleven months ago, Vox had no representatives in any institution. Today we are the third biggest political party in Spain and the one that is growing the most (…). We have caused a political and cultural change and have opened up some taboo debates*" said Santiago Abascal when the results were announced.

Undoubtedly Vox benefited from the Catalan crisis and the violence that followed the verdict of Spain's Supreme Court, which, on 14th October convicted 9 Catalan leaders with prison sentences ranging from 9 to 13 years for sedition, rebellion and embezzlement of funds, for having organised a referendum on the independence of Catalonia on 1st October 2017, and for 'having declared the latter's unilateral independence, an unconstitutional act. "*It is a protest vote,*" indicated Gabriel Colomé, a political expert, who added "*the people who voted for Vox are not for the far right, but they want to show that they have had enough of the system. Barcelona burnt for five days; Vox took advantage of this. It is Catalonia which is giving them the votes, not immigration,*" he added. "*It is not his charisma which is attracting voters (…) The success of his party comes from the crisis in Catalonia and from the fact that the traditional parties have been unable to find a solution,*" confirmed Ignacio Jurado, a political expert from the university Carlos III of Madrid as he spoke of Santiago Abascal. Spain has therefore joined the majority of the EU Member States, which have witnessed the steady rise of the populist parties.

General Francisco Franco, who ruled Spain between 1939 and 1975, was recently been exhumed from the magnificent mausoleum where he was buried – a «profanation» according to Santiago Abascal - and his remains moved to a more discreet cemetery, but the dictator's ideas are well back in the Iberian kingdom.

The Catalan independence parties also achieved a historic result in this election. Together they won 23 seats in the Congress of Deputies. Candidature for People's Unity-For Separation (CUP-PR), a far-left independence party, which had always refused to take part in the national elections, will even be making its début in parliament.

"*Pedro Sanchez' game of poker will turn against him. It is fostering the most extreme poles by offering a new platform for Vox on the one hand, and by pushing the radical Catalan independence parties on the other, in the shape of the Candidature for People's Unity-For Separation, who will make their debut in parliament for the very first time. It is a failure for the Socialists but undoubtedly also for the whole of Spanish democracy,*" forecasts José Antonio Zarzalejos, a political columnist just a few days prior to the election.

Turnout was slightly weaker than that recorded in the previous elections on 28th April: 69.87% (- 1.89 points).

Results of the parliamentary elections on 10th November 2019 in Spain

Turnout: 69.87%

Congress of Deputies

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes cast	No. of seats
Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	6 752 983	28	120
People's Party (PP)	5 019 869	20.82	88
Vox	3 640 063	15.09	52
Unidas Podemos	3 097 185	12.84	35
Ciudadanos (Cs)	1 637 540	6.79	10
Republican Left of Catalonia-Sobiranistes (ERC-Sobiranistes)	869 934	3.61	13
Together for Catalonia (JxCat)	527 375	2.19	8
More Countries (Mas Pais)	577 055	2.4	3
Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ/ PNV)	377 423	1,59	7
Euskal Herria Bildu (EH Bildu)	276 519	1.15	5
Candidature for People's Unity-For Separation (CUP-PR)	244 754	1.01	2
Canary Coalition-Canary Nationalist Party (CC–PNC)	123 981	0.51	2
Galician Nationalist Bloc-Nos(BNG-Nos)	119 597	0.5	1
Navarra Suma (NA+)	98 448	0.41	2
Regionalist Party of Cantabria (PRC)	68 580	0.28	1
Teruel exists	19 696	0.08	1
Others	915 029	2.73	0

Source: https://resultados.10noviembre2019.es/Congreso/Total-nacional/0/es

Senate

Political Parties	No. of seats
Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	92
People's Party (PP)	84
Republican Left of Catalonia-Sobiranistes (ERC-Sobiranistes)	11
Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ/PNV)	9
Together for Catalonia (JxCat)	3
Teruel exists	2
Vox	2
Gomerian Socialist Group (ASG)	1
Euskal Herria Bildu (EH Bildu)	1

Source : https://resultados.10noviembre2019.es/Senado/Total-nacional/0/es

The parliamentary elections on 10th November were meant to help Spain find a majority government, but they have complicated matters since Parliament is even more fragmented than before. Consequently, the Iberian kingdom is more ungovernable than on 28th April last. "*The formation of a government will again take time and Spain will have to spend the Christmas holiday without an executive,*" declared Antonio Barroso, an analyst for Teneo.

Neither the parties on the left (Socialist Workers' Party, Unidas Podemos, and More Countries), nor the ones on the right (People's Party, Ciudadanos and Vox) won an absolute majority of seats in the Congress of Deputies (176 seats). On 10th November transfers of votes took place within in each of the blocks and the balance of power has therefore remained as it was before the elections.

Now there are two solutions now open to Pedro Sanchez.

The first is the formation of a minority socialist government which will require the abstention of the People's Party. "*Competition between the People's Party and Vox is encouraging the former to block the creation of a left-wing government,*" indicated Antonio Barroso.

The second solution is the formation of a grand coalition between the PSOE and the PP, which to date both parties have always ruled out, deeming that this would worsen the crisis of political representation, since it would cloud the border between left and right. Such an alliance would also make Vox the leading opposition party in parliament. But do they now have any other choice?

"*Repeated parliamentary elections have reduced the possibilities of negotiation and operation, both for the Socialist Workers' Party and Unidas Podemos, notably due to the rise of Vox,*" declared Javier Franzé, a professor of political theory at the Faculty of Political Science and Sociology at the University Complutense in Madrid. "*It will be difficult to resolve the situation, but no one right now is in any mood for further elections. It is the biggest thing that will prevent us returning to ballot*", declared Oriol Bartomeus, professor of Political Science at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

"*Somehow, we shall form a progressive government and we shall settle the political deadlock (…) We are calling on all political parties, except for those who are working against cohabitation and who are encouraging hate,*" said Pedro Sanchez after the election.

One thing is certain: all politicians will, as an imperative, have to find an answer to the present stalemate. Otherwise political instability will continue in Spain and, in the long term, Spanish democracy will falter.

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