

European
Elections monitor

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ANALYSIS

Fourth parliamentary elections in four years for the Spanish

On 17th September last, after consultation with the various political parties, the King of Spain Felipe VI indicated that *"there was no candidate who enjoyed the necessary support to form a government"*. Six days later Parliament (*Cortes generales*) was dissolved. As a result, 36.8 million Spaniards are being invited to ballot on 10th November for the fourth time in four years and for the second time this year, to elect the 556 members of the two houses of Parliament.

The electoral campaign will start on 1st November next.

Spain has been experiencing a political crisis for the past five years. This is due to the emergence of new movements on the political playing field (Podemos Ciudadanos, Vox), whilst the two parties – People's Party (PP) on the right and the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) on the left have dominated the Spanish political landscape since 1982. *"The country, which has had a bipartite system since the re-establishment of democracy, has not yet integrated the entry of the new parties. At national level we have never had a coalition government in the way that other countries have had. Coming to compromise can even be costly from an electoral point of view"*, stresses Jorge Galindo, a political expert. After the elections on 28th April last, all of the parties insisted they were working towards an agreement and to the formation of a government without really convincing the Spanish population. According to a poll by the Centre for Sociological Surveys (CIS) in Madrid, politicians and their political parties are deemed by the public to be Spain's main problem ahead of unemployment.

The political crisis is also linked to the various corruption scandals and to the breakthrough of the secessionists in Catalonia. On 1st October 2017, the Catalan government organised a (illegal) referendum on the region's independence. Ten days later the regional President Carles Puigdemont (Together for Catalonia – Junts per Catalunya, JxCat), proclaimed that *"Catalonia has won the right to be an independent State"*. On 27th October the region committed to a *"constitutive process"* to separate from Spain. The Prime Minister at the time, Mariano Rajoy (PP), then dismissed the Catalan government and convened new regional elections. On 30th October 2017, Carles Puigdemont fled to Belgium to escape prosecution. He is under the threat of an international arrest warrant.

The parliamentary elections on 10th November next will be taking place in an extremely tense context. On 14th October the Supreme Court delivered sentences ranging from 9 to 13 years in prison against 9 Catalan leaders convicted of sedition, rebellion and the embezzlement of funds, to have organised a referendum on the independence of Catalonia on 1st October 2017 and for having unilaterally declared the independence of Catalonia, an unconstitutional measure. Three other leaders were sentenced to fines of 60,000 € each for disobedience. Since the announcement of the verdict, many violent demonstrations have been taking place in Catalonia and the region is still greatly disrupted today.

The polls are forecasting a new victory for the PSOE in the upcoming election. Its leader, outgoing Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez is asking his fellow

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countrymen to give him a clear majority. *"I hope that the Spanish will give the PSOE a wide majority so that you will no longer be able to prevent the formation of a government which Spain badly needs"*, he declared to the other parties. Even though it is still difficult to predict, abstention might be high, with the electorate being increasingly difficult to motivate as the elections succeed one another and as they reveal their incapacity to enable Spain to form a government.

According to a poll by Key Data published by the online newspaper *Publico*, the PSOE is due to win the election with 28.2% of the vote ahead of the PP, 20.7%. The radical left-wing alliance Unidos Podemos (P) is due to come third with 12.2% of the vote, followed by the centrists of Ciudadanos (Cs), 10.8% and Vox (Voice), a right-wing populist party, 10.3%.

REVIEW OF THE SIX-MONTH CRISIS

On 28th April last the PSOE of outgoing Pedro Sanchez won a clear victory in the parliamentary elections, which occurred early following the rejection of the country's budget by the Congress of Deputies, the lower house of Parliament, on 13th February. The PSOE won 28.68% of the vote and 123 seats. The main opposition party, the People's Party (PP) collapsed: it won 16.7% of the vote and 66 seats. Ciudadanos came third with 15.85% and 57 seats. The Unidos Podemos Alliance won 14.31% and 42 seats. Finally, Vox won 10.26% and 24 seats. Turnout was extremely high totalling 71.76%.

Some weeks later the PSOE also won in the European elections and became the leading delegation in the S&D at the European Parliament after the election on 26th May. Pedro Sanchez's party also won the local elections in Spain on the same day, an election from which Podemos emerged weakened and not really able to dictate its conditions to Pedro Sanchez. On 6th June King Felipe VI asked the latter to form a government.

There are several options open to the socialist leader. He could have tried to form a government alone, as he did in June 2018, with the case by case support of certain parties, but none of them accepted this possibility. *"To do this one of the parties would have to give in, either Podemos or Ciudadanos, so that they would abstain but in exchange for almost nothing,"* stressed Lluís Orriols, a professor of political science at the University Carlos III of Madrid.

The second option was similar to the situation in Portugal: the socialist government would have the support of the radical left in Parliament but Podemos, which wanted to enter government refused to do this. The third option was to govern with the support a part of the right-wing. Pedro Sanchez addressed a request like this to the People's Party and to Ciudadanos. The first refused, the second did not respond. The leader of Ciudadanos, Alberto Rivera refused to speak with Pedro Sanchez.

Finally, the fourth option was the formation of a left-wing coalition with Podemos, but this was impossible since the two parties did not reach agreement.

Right from the beginning of negotiations Pedro Sanchez indicated that he preferred to form a minority government supported by Podemos and regionalist movements. Without the Catalan parties (which forced him to organise early elections), he drew close to the absolute majority in Parliament (176), vital during the first vote of investiture – a relative majority is enough in the second round. Podemos wanted to enter government. *"Programmes are often blown away by the wind"* maintained its leader Pablo Iglesias. The PSOE tried to create a relationship of trust with Podemos and suggested the creation of a bureau responsible for checking the execution of the agreements that were dependent on the Finance Ministry and Monitoring Committees in Parliament. It also offered Podemos various responsibilities in various State organisations and institutions.

Pedro Sanchez maintained that he needed stability, which in his opinion was provided to him by a coalition government with Podemos, meaning that he constantly had to ensure that he won the support of the Basque nationalists and the abstention of the Catalan secessionists. *"I wanted a government that was moderate, coherent, which did not emerge divided and which did not depend on independentist forces,"* declared Pedro Sanchez.

On 23rd July Pedro Sanchez won 124 votes, i.e. 52 less than the minimum required, against 170 and 52 abstentions in the first round of the vote of investiture. Two days later he won 124 votes, against 155 and 67 abstentions. Negotiations continued during the summer and on 3rd September, Pedro Sanchez unveiled a programme that he hoped would be supported by the far left. It comprised 370 measures including the capping of rent increases, an increase in university grants, a rise in the minimum wage to 60% of the average wage, the repeal of the reforms made to the labour market and retirement pensions approved by Mariano Rajoy's government (PP), the reassessment of retirement pensions, free nurseries for children under three years of age. This spending would have been financed by a minimum 15% corporate tax (18% for banks and energy companies), the creation of a tax on financial transactions and a carbon tax. The PSOE did not manage to gain the support of the other parties. The extremely fragmented opposition was unable to offer an alternative coalition either.

On 17th September Ciudadanos suggested its abstention and that of the People's Party during the next vote of investiture on condition that Pedro Sanchez promise not to pardon the Catalan separatists if the latter were convicted and that he accept to bring the alliance to an end which united his party to the Basque nationalists in the Euskal Herria Bildu alliance (Reunite the Basque country) in Navarre, to the benefit of parties on the right. Pedro Sanchez categorically refused to do this. The People's Party also rejected the suggestion which allowed Alberto Rivera to say that he had tried to help form a government.

Since the Spanish Constitution provides for the dissolution of Parliament if the head of government is not elected after the first vote investiture, the Spanish parliament was dissolved on 23rd September.

THE PARTIES RUNNING

"We are the only political party that can offer stability, provide that State with meaning and set out a clear roadmap," declared Pedro Sanchez as he launched the electoral campaign. *"There is no time to be lost with complaints or to blame each other,"* he added. *"The socialists are trying to form a government and to blame Podemos if they fail,"* stressed Pablo Simon, a political science professor at Carols III of Madrid.

"In 2016, Podemos did not want an agreement with the PSOE because it dreamed of replacing it. Now both parties will have to acknowledge their mutual weaknesses. Pedro Sanchez can no longer govern with the self-centred style which allowed him to survive to date and Pablo Iglesias cannot count on the post of Deputy Prime Minister to control the refounding of the party," indicated Juan Rodriguez Teruel, a professor of political science at the University of Valencia.

Podemos under threat in two ways: it might be sanctioned for having rejected the proposals made to it in July by the PSOE on the one hand, and it might have a strong rival in the new party Mas Pais (More of the Country), created in September last by the Podemos's former second in command, Inigo Errejón on the other.

Further to the right of the political scale, Ciudadanos is currently experiencing an internal crisis due to the party's swing to the right and its links with Vox for example in Andalusia, even though it says that it has not signed an agreement with it. Some of its executives have resigned. Others (around 80% according to an online poll for the newspaper *El Español*) have for a long-time supported negotiation with Pedro Sanchez, a possibility that was ruled out

by Alberto Rivera, who accused the Socialist leader of having “*sold out to the Catalans*”. However, on 5th October last there was a dramatic development: Alberto Rivera said he was prepared to end the obstruction of the institutions and to work with the socialists after the elections on 10th November. He said he supported an agreement of national unity with the PSOE led by Pedro Sanchez and the PP on several issues. Political analysts suggest the collapse of Ciudadanos in the polls and the pressure made by the party’s partners in Europe as an explanation to this change of mind.

Ciudadanos’ goal is to replace the PP. “*Convinced that the People’s Party will go through a tough period, Ciudadanos wants to impose itself as the leader on the right; to do this it has to reject all alliances with the left*” indicated Cristina Monge, a political expert at the University of Saragossa. Ciudadanos is undoubtedly the party with the most to lose in a new election because the Spanish in the centre and on the right might opt to cast a “*useful vote*” and turn to Pablo Casado’s PP.

THE SPANISH POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Spanish Parliament (Cortes generales) is bicameral. It comprises the Senate (upper house) and the Congress of Deputies (lower house). The latter has 348 MPs elected at least every four years by a proportional multi-member vote (according to the d'Hondt system with blocked, closed lists) in 48 of the 50 Spanish provincial constituencies - Ceuta and Melilla vote by a simple majority vote - each appoint at least 2 MPs (only one for Ceuta and Melilla). The remaining seats are distributed amongst the provinces according to their population. The biggest constituencies are Madrid (37 seats), Barcelona (32), Valencia (15), Sevilla and Alicante (12), Malaga (11) and Murcia (10). A list has to win at least 3% of the vote to be represented in the Congress of Deputies.

The Senate has 208 members elected from open lists (provincial senators) and 56 representatives appointed by 17 autonomous communities

(community senators). Each of the 50 provinces elects 4 provincial senators by a majority vote no matter how many inhabitants there are, except for Ceuta and Melilla who appoint two and the Balearic and Canary Islands, whose bigger islands (Grand Canarias, Mallorca and Tenerife) elect three and each of the smaller islands (Ibiza-Formentera, Minorca, Fuerteventura, Gomero, Hierro, Lanzarote and Palma), 1. Moreover each autonomous community appoints (by proportional vote) a community senator plus an additional one for every million inhabitants. This system favours the least populated regions in the kingdom. In all the upper house has 264 members. The senatorial elections take place on the same day as those for the Congress of Deputies.

13 political parties are represented in the present Congress of Deputies:

- The Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE), founded in 1879 and led by outgoing Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez - 123 seats;
- The People’s Party (PP), created in 1977, and led by Pablo Casado since 21st July 2018 - 66 seats;
- Ciudadanos (C's), a centrist party founded in 2006 and led by Alberto Rivera, - 57 MPs;
- Unidos Podemos, alliance of 12 parties including Podemos, led by Pablo Iglesias, the United Left (IU) and Equo - 42 seats;
- Vox (Voice in Latin), a populist right-wing party founded in 2013 after the scission of the People’s Party, led by Santiago Abascal, - 24 seats;
- the Republican Left of Catalan-Sovereignists (ERC-Sobiranistes), alliance of two Catalan independence parties - 15 seats;
- Together for Catalonia (Junts per Catalunya, JxCat), a Catalan independence party, formed by the European Democratic Party (PDeCAT) and independence personalities - 7 seats;
- The Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ/PNV), founded in 1984, led by Andoni Ortuzar - 6 seats;
- Euskal Herria Bildu (Reunite the Basque Country), alliance of four Basque parties whose spokesperson is Maddalen Iriarte - 4 MPs;
- The Canary Coalition-Canary Nationalist Party (CC-PNC), alliance of a regional right-wing party led

by Claudina Morales and another regionalist party led by Juan Manuel Gracia Ramos - 2 seats;

- Navarra Suma (NA+), coalition of the Navarre People's Union (UPN), the People's Party and Ciudadanos, led by José Javier Esparza - 2 seats;
- The regionalist party of Cantabria, a regionalist party led by Miguel Angel Revilla -1 seat;
- The Compromise Coalition (Commitment), coalition of the Valencia Community which rallies the Valencia Nationalist Bloc, the Initiative of the

Valencia People and VerdsEquo of the Valencia Country has one seat.

The PSOE also holds the majority in the Senate: it won 123 seats during the elections on 28th April 2019. The PP won 55, the Republic Left of Catalonia-Sovereignists (ERC-Sobiranistes) 11 and the Basque National Party 9.

Reminder of the parliamentary elections on 28th April 2019 in Spain

Turnout : 71,76%

Congress of Deputies

Political parties	Number of votes won	Percentage of votes won	Number of seats
Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	7 513 142	28,67	123
People's Party (PP)	4 373 653	16,69	66
Ciudadanos (Cs)	4 155 665	15,86	57
Unidas Podemos	3 751 145	14,32	42
Vox	2 688 092	10,26	24
Republican Left of Catalanian-Sovereignists (ERC-Sobiranistes)	1 024 628	3,91	15
Together for Catalonia (JxCat)	500 787	1,91	7
Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ/PNV)	395 884	1,51	6
Euskal Herria Bildu (EH Bildu)	259 647	0,99	4
Compromise Coalition	173 821	0,66	1
Canary Coalition-Canary Nationalist Party (CC-PNC)	137 664	0,53	2
Navarra Suma (NA+)	107 619	0,41	2
Regionalist Party of Cantabria (PRC)	52 266	0,20	1
Others	845 626	4,08	0

Source : <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/infoelectoral/min/busquedaAvanzadaAction.html?codTipoEleccion=2&vuelta=1&isHome=1&codPeriodo=201904>

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Senate

Political parties	Number of seats
Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	123
People's Party (PP)	55
Republican Left of Catalonia-Sovereignists (ERC-Sobiranistes)	11
Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ/PNV)	9
Ciudadanos (Cs)	5
Together for Catalonia (JxCat)	2
Socialist Gómeran Group (ASG)	1
Euskal Herria Bildu (EH Bildu)	1
Navarre People's Union (UPN)	1

Source : <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/infoelectoral/min/busquedaAvanza-daAction.html?codTipoEleccion=3&vuelta=1&isHome=1&codPeriodo=201904>

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