European Elections monitor

Spanish snap elections on 29 November: is it the end of the Sánchez era?

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Analysis

On 29 November, Spaniards are being called upon to vote in snap parliamentary elections nine months ahead of schedule to elect members of the Congress of Deputies and the Senate (the two chambers of Parliament, the Cortes). These elections were called following large-scale protests, sparked by the eviction of 87-year-old Maricarmen from her home of 71 years. She suddenly became a symbol of Spain's worsening housing crisis. The President of the Government (Prime Minister) Pedro Sánchez, of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), tried, rather too late, to push through two emergency decree-laws to remedy the situation, but these were voted down on 2 October by the opposition: the People's Party (PP), Vox and Junts per Catalunya. Consequently, Pedro Sánchez dissolved the Cortes on 5 October, deeming that it was up to the people to decide whether or not his government was worthy of the public's confidence to continue leading the country.

Thirty-nine million Spaniards are set to go to the polls for this election. But in an extremely fragmented political landscape, what will their decision be? The two main parties, the PSOE (left) and the PP (right), will go head-to-head, whilst Vox (far right) is emerging as a third political force, having gained ground since the last elections in 2023. In addition to these three main forces, there are a myriad of smaller but significant regional parties, five of which are on the left of the political spectrum. However, will they once again lend their support to Pedro Sánchez for a fourth term?

To form a government, a party or coalition will need to secure 176 seats to hold an absolute majority. It should be remembered, however, that in 2023 the outgoing Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, managed – without winning the parliamentary elections on 23 July – to remain in power by preventing the People's Party, the main centre-right opposition party which came out ahead in the vote, from securing a majority, including by forming an alliance with the right-wing populist party, Vox.

What has Pedro Sánchez's achieved since 2018?

Pedro Sánchez has been in office since 2 June 2018 (2018–2020, 2020–2023, 2023–2026); he was re-elected in the 2019 snap elections and re-elected for a third term in 2023 at the head of a minority coalition with Sumar (a coalition of left-wing parties) and regional parties from Catalonia, Galicia, the Canary Islands and the Basque Country. Since becoming Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez appears to have achieved tangible successes in several areas, such as the economy, the justice system, taxation, housing, health, climate and energy, to name but a few.

The Economy

From an economic perspective, Spain is performing well, with an estimated GDP growth rate of 2.7% in the third quarter of 2026, whilst the European Union average stood at just 1.5%. Although the unemployment rate remains relatively high (10.3% in September) compared with the overall European Union average (6.2%), the number of unemployed people has been falling over the last five years. Before Pedro Sánchez came to power, the country had seen unemployment figures peak at between 17% and 26%. His government has also raised the minimum wage to €1,080 per month and reduced

the number of temporary contracts, with over 80% of those under 35 now in permanent employment. It is particularly worth noting that the coalition government has invested over 40% of the funds allocated under the European Union's post-Covid recovery plan (NextGenerationEU) in climate action and energy-saving measures, by supporting sustainable mobility, energy efficiency in housing and clean energy. Also, it should be mentioned that Spain, along with Italy, was the main beneficiary of this plan, receiving €102 billion and €194.4 billion respectively.

Housing

On the issue of housing – the original reason behind the government's dissolution – measures have been taken to improve the situation, such as capping rent increases at 3%; landlords are eligible for a 10% tax relief if they voluntarily reduce their rents in the most expensive regions (Catalonia, Madrid and the southern coast); local authorities have been given the power to impose a 50% surcharge on properties left vacant and undeveloped for two years; finally, the proportion of affordable housing has been increased from 30 to 40% in new housing developments, and from 10 to 20 % in regeneration schemes.

Taxation

Income tax has been reduced for those on the lowest incomes. A minimum rate of 15% has been imposed on the 1,070 largest companies, whilst corporation tax for start-ups has been reduced from 25% to 15%. Investments in start-ups have also benefited from tax relief, whilst VAT on essential goods has been suspended to combat the rising cost of living.

Justice

In the field of justice, Pedro Sánchez's government has abolished the offence of sedition and re-established official dialogue with the Catalan government, which had been severely compromised in 2017 when this autonomous community attempted to organise a referendum on its independence. Initially, the PP and Vox parties challenged the laws passed by the government in 2024 aimed at granting a full amnesty to Carles Puigdemont and other Catalan leaders. In 2025, the Spanish Constitutional Court upheld this measure. However, given the persistent challenges following these decisions, the Spanish Courts referred the matter to the Court of Justice of the European Union and, in July 2026, the latter finally delivered a decision stating that the amnesty did not affect the European Union's financial interests and did not contravene any of the Union's anti-terrorism directives.

The Spanish government has also taken steps to turn the page on one of the darkest chapters in Spain's history, by updating the 2007 Historical Memory Act to grant a retroactive pardon to the victims of Franco's dictatorship and to make the State responsible for the exhumation of mass graves. In 2019, the remains of the dictator Franco were exhumed from the Valley of the Fallen and reburied at the municipal cemetery of Mingorrubio-El Pardo alongside his wife, in accordance with his family's wishes.

Why is Pedro Sánchez facing criticism today?

Since 2025, Pedro Sánchez has been facing increasing difficulties, starting with the collapse of the minority coalition that had enabled him to come to office following the 2023 elections. In particular, he had been relying on the support of seven MPs from Junts per Catalunya, led by Carles Puigdemont. Junts withdrew its support, apparently due to a lack of results and the PSOE's failure to honour the commitments it had initially made. This significantly weakened the government, leaving it exposed to a host of political and social discontent in 2026.

Accusations of corruption

It is worth recalling that Pedro Sánchez took office in 2018 following a government led by the People's Party (PP) which had proved to be particularly corrupt, as illustrated, for example, by the Gürtel, Barcenas and Kitchen affairs, promising to act differently. However, over the past two years, members of the government,

as well as members of the Prime Minister's family, have been accused of corruption.

- In 2025, Santos Cerdán, secretary of the PSOE, was summoned to appear in court after a judge suggested that he may have acted in collusion with former party officials to award public contracts irregularly in exchange for bribes.

- David Sánchez, Pedro Sánchez's younger brother, was found guilty of influence-peddling and embezzlement in the summer of 2026 and was barred from holding public office for nine years.

- Sánchez's wife, Begoña Gómez, has been accused of using her influence to secure and hold a post at the Complutense University of Madrid, as well as of using public resources and her personal connections to further her private interests. The trial is ongoing, and the prosecution has sought a 24-year prison sentence against her.

- Finally, the former Prime Minister (2004–2011), José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (PSOE), has been implicated in similar allegations relating to the bailout of the airline Ultra Plus, amounting to €53 million, and the misuse of these funds.

Immigration

In April, Spain took exceptional measures, going against the trend seen elsewhere in Europe, where many countries have adopted a restrictive policy towards immigration from third countries. The government decided to offer undocumented workers the opportunity to regularise their status. This measure came into force on 16 April, with those concerned able to apply for regularisation until 30 June. To counter criticism of this policy, the government set out certain conditions: undocumented migrants had to have been resident in Spain for at least five months prior to their application, and the resulting residence permit would be valid for a temporary period of one year. They also had to have a clean criminal record. Contrary to claims made by certain far-right parties in other European Union countries, holders of this temporary visa can only live and work in Spain. Most undocumented migrants in Spain come from Latin America, mainly Colombia and Venezuela, Spanish-speaking countries. More than a million people applied for one of the 500,000 one-year residence permits made available.

Similarly, four years ago, the government passed the 'Law on Democratic Memory' to redress the wrongs and injustices inflicted during the 40 years of Franco's dictatorship. This law offered Spanish nationality to those who had been forced into exile during the Civil War: around 2.4 million people have applied and 544,000 have been accepted to date.

Pedro Sánchez justified these measures by arguing that, faced with an unfavourable demographic trend, Spain would need more foreign labour to sustain the country's economy in the near future. Both the PSOE and the PP have implemented such measures in the past, but this time the criticism has been particularly fierce from the PP and Vox. The outcry intensified significantly last July, when a migration crisis erupted in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, situated on the North African coast on the border with Morocco.

Although the reasons for this crisis remain unclear — 72,000 people, mainly young men, attempted to storm the border to enter Spanish territory, resulting in 140 deaths — it might be attributed to false rumours circulating on social media regarding legalisation or, as other reports suggest, to the fact that the Moroccan government may have actively encouraged this influx for political reasons; it is clear, however, that this was not a spontaneous event. Spain was forced to mobilise both the police and the army to contain the crowd.

The majority of those who attempted to cross the border were eventually sent back following an agreement reached between the Spanish and Moroccan governments. However, opposition parties have openly criticised the Sánchez government, and some of Spain's European partners have expressed alarm, with the country being accused of failing to adequately defend the European Union's external borders. Twenty-two Member States sent an open letter to Pedro Sánchez to protest against the chaos caused. In an exceptional

move the King of Spain, Felipe VI, undertook a high-profile visit to Ceuta and Melilla on 13 and 14 October, a first since he ascended the throne in 2014.

Public Safety

Finally, two serious rail accidents occurred in Spain in January and October, resulting in the deaths of 46 people and 292 injuries in the first, and 69 deaths and over 200 injuries in the second. Negligence and human error are believed to have caused these accidents; Vox has been highly critical of the government's responsibility. Demonstrations took place outside the Ministry of Transport, during which protesters called for the resignation of Oscar Puente, Minister for Transport and Sustainable Mobility. Although these accidents cannot be directly attributed to the government, Oscar Puente resigned in the wake of these disasters, stating that he could not in all conscience remain in office after two such serious accidents.

The Opposition Parties

The People's Party

The People's Party (PP) is the PSOE's long-standing rival, but in recent years voters have turned away from the traditional parties, as these do not seem to offer solutions to the problems facing the population. In power between 1996 and 2004 (Aznar), and then from 2001 to 2018 (Rajoy), it now seems that he would be prepared this time to form a pact with Vox – which has seen a significant rise in voting intentions since the 2023 elections – in order to improve his results and return to power. This contrasts with the previous election in 2023, when Alberto Núñez Feijóo, the party's leader, had pledged not to form an alliance with the far right. In October, Alberto Núñez Feijóo stated that he would continue talks with Santiago Abascal, the leader of Vox, with the aim of preventing Pedro Sánchez from remaining in power.

Vox

Vox, a far-right party founded in 2013, won seats in Parliament following the 2019 elections and has seen its electoral influence grow since then. It sees these snap elections as an opportunity to highlight its manifesto, which includes, in particular, the deportation of undocumented migrants and giving priority to Spanish nationals over foreign residents when it comes to social benefits. Its manifesto also aims to implement much more socially conservative policies. Vox is Eurosceptic; it sits within the Patriots (PfE) group in the European Parliament and may therefore be tempted to roll back or oppose certain European regulations.

Buoyed by its gains, Vox appears determined to claim key ministerial posts in the next government should the People's Party win on 29 November. Regional elections over the past twelve months show that these two parties are on the rise, but will they manage to reach an agreement at national level? It appears that the People's Party will not, on its own, secure the necessary absolute majority and may be forced to negotiate with Vox despite their differences of opinion.

It should be noted that the People's Party is a member of the EPP Group in the European Parliament. Would this rapprochement with Vox signify a reversal of alliances and herald a new stance on Europe? It will be up to Spanish voters to decide whether they wish to move further to the right or remain in the moderate centre.

Local elections and the PSOE

Spain is a federation comprising 17 autonomous communities and 2 autonomous cities (Ceuta and Melilla), established by the 1978 Constitution. Regional elections often serve as a barometer for national elections; recent results reflect political shifts and could foreshadow the outcome of the election on 29 November.

- In December 2025, the region of Extremadura The People's Party won 29 of the 65 seats up for election, whilst the PSOE won 18 and Vox 11.

- In February 2026, the region of Aragon organised elections in which Vox made a significant breakthrough by doubling its 2023 result, rising

from 7 to 14 elected representatives; the People's Party came top with 26 elected representatives, whilst the PSOE recorded its worst-ever result, losing 5 seats to end up with 18 elected representatives.

- In March, Castilla-y-León went to the polls, and once again, the PP and Vox made significant gains, securing 31.4 per cent and 17.6 per cent of the vote respectively, whilst the PSOE secured 30 per cent. However, although Vox and the PP did not form a coalition following this election, the PP remained dependent on Vox's support, as it did not win enough seats to secure a majority.

- In Andalusia, Spain's most populous region, the May 2026 elections saw victory for the PP, which won 53 seats – two short of a majority. The PSOE won just 28 and Vox 15.

The parties running

The Electoral Commission announced on 3 November that 29 parties will be standing in the parliamentary election with the list of candidates as follows.

- The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), led by Pedro Sánchez; in 2023, the PSOE and Sumar formed a minority government with 121 seats,
- The People's Party (PP), led by Alberto Núñez Feijóo, the main opposition party, won the largest number of seats (137). It is allied with the Union of the Navarrese People (UPN) in Navarre.
- Vox (far right), led by Santiago Abascal, won 33 seats.
- Frente Amplio (left), led by Ada Colau, is a coalition comprising Sumar, United Left (IU), Más Madrid and Comuns; Sumar won 31 seats in 2023.
- Podemos (far left) is led by Irene Montero. In 2023, it was part of Sumar, but this time it is standing separately.
- Se Acabó La Fiesta – 'The Party's Over' (SALF – far right) is led by Alvise Pérez. This is its first time standing in general elections. It won 3 of Spain's 61 seats in the European Parliament in 2024.
- The Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC – left) is led by Gabriel Rufián and is standing in four Catalan provinces as well as in Navarre, alongside EH Bildu; it won 7 seats in 2023.
- Junts per Catalunya (Junts – left), led by Míriam Nogueras, is standing in four Catalan provinces; it won 7 seats in 2023 and supported the coalition formed by the PSOE and Sumar, before withdrawing that support in October 2025.
- Euskal Herria Bildu (EH Bildu – left) is led by Oskar Matute and is standing in three Basque provinces as well as in Navarre, alongside the ERC; it won 6 seats in 2023.
- The Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV – liberal) is led by Idoia Sagastizabal. It is fielding candidates in three Basque provinces; it won 5 seats in 2023.
- The Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG – left), led by Néstor Rego, is standing in four Galician provinces; it won 1 seat in 2023.
- The Canarian Coalition (centre-right), led by Cristina Valido, will field candidates in both provinces of the Canary Islands, alongside Municipalistas Primero Canarias; it won 1 seat in 2023.
- Compromís: Front Valencià (left), led by Àgueda Micó, is standing alongside the EUPV, Podem and the ERPV in the three Valencian provinces; it was part of Sumar in 2023.

What do the polls say?

According to the most recent polls, The PP is projected to secure 29.8 per cent of the vote, followed by the PSOE on 26.9 per cent; Vox is expected to come third with 19.9 per cent, whilst Frente Amplio could secure 6.7 per cent. Small regional parties could play a decisive role because, although they do not secure high percentages of the vote, their seats are allocated proportionally under the electoral system described below.

The Spanish political system

The Spanish Parliament (Cortes Generales) is bicameral. It consists of an upper house, the Senate, and a lower house, the Congress of Deputies.

The Congress of Deputies has 348 members, elected at least every four years by multi-member proportional representation using the d'Hondt method from closed and fixed lists in 48 of the 50 provincial constituencies (Ceuta and Melilla vote by simple majority), each of which elects at least two deputies (one for Ceuta and Melilla). The remaining seats are allocated amongst the provinces according to their population. The largest constituencies are those of Madrid (37 seats), Barcelona (32), Valencia (16), Seville and Alicante (12), Málaga (11) and Murcia (10). A list must obtain at least 3 per cent of the vote to be represented in the Congress of Deputies.

The Senate comprises 208 members elected from open lists (provincial senators) and 56 representatives appointed by the country's 17 autonomous communities (community senators). Each of the 50 provinces, regardless of its population, elects 4 provincial senators by a first-past-the-post system, with the exception of Ceuta and Melilla, which elect 2, and the Balearic and Canary Islands, where each of the larger islands (Gran Canaria, Mallorca and Tenerife) elects three, and each of the smaller islands (Ibiza-Formentera, Menorca, Fuerteventura, La Gomera, El Hierro, Lanzarote and Palma) elects one. In addition, each autonomous community appoints (on a proportional basis) one community senator and one additional senator per million inhabitants. This system favours the least populous regions of the kingdom.

Senate elections are held on the same day as those for the Congress of Deputies.

Results of the parliamentary elections held on 23 July 2023 in Spain

Chamber of Deputies (Congreso)

Turnout: 69.95 %

Political parties	Number of votes won	% of votes won	Number of seats
People's Party (PP)	8 091 840	33.05	136
Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	7 760 970	31.70	122
Vox	3 033 744	12.39	33
Sumar (S)	3 014 006	12.31	31
Together for Catalonia (JxCat)	392 634	1.89	7
Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC)	462 883	1.60	7
Unite the Basque Country (EH Bildu)	333 362	1.36	6
Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ/PNV)	275 782	1.12	5
Animalist Party for the Environment (PACMA)	165 768	0.67	0
Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG)	1 523 727	0.62	1
Canarian Coalition (CC)	114 718	0.46	1
Union of the Navarrese People (UPN)	51 764	0.21	1
Others		2.61	0

Source: https://resultados-elecciones.rtve.es/generales/2023/congreso/

Senate (Senado)

Turnout: 70.13 %

Political parties	Number of Seats
People's Party (PP)	120
Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	72
Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ/PNV)	4
Unite the Basque Country (EH Bildu)	4
Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC)	3
Independent Left	7
Together for Catalonia (JxCat)	1
Union of the Navarrese People (UPN)	1
Girona Socialist Group (ASG)	1
El Hierro Independent Group (AHI)	1
Others	0

Source : https://resultados-elecciones.rtve.es/generales/2023/senado/

Having been in office for more than eight years, is Pedro Sánchez on the wane? Have voters grown weary of the progressive laws passed during this period? Have the various corruption scandals finally brought him and his party down? Or could he pull off another feat and remain in power? In the face of adversity, he has often proved capable of turning the situation to his advantage.

Could the People's Party gain the upper hand, but will it win enough seats to form a majority? If it fails to secure an absolute majority, would it be prepared to form an alliance with Vox, and, if so, will these two parties manage to overcome their differences to reach a lasting coalition agreement? On what platform?

Much will depend on the campaign, which begins on 13 November and ends at midnight on 27 November, leaving a day for reflection before the vote. Various television channels are organising face-to-face debates (on 16 November on Mediaset, on 17 November on RTVE and on 23 November on Atresmedia). These channels have also offered to organise televised debates with the main candidates on 18, 23 and 26 November.

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