

Spanish elections: Support for Podemos declines amid predicted losses for main parties

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Polls for the May 24 elections in 13 of Spain's 17 regions and around 8,000 municipalities suggest the hold of the two main parties—the right wing Popular Party (PP) and Socialist Workers party (PSOE)—will fragment even further.

The PP will lose nearly all its absolute majorities, even in heartland—with the PSOE unable to benefit. In many regions and cities, two new parties—the pseudo-left Podemos (We Can) and the right-wing Ciudadanos (Citizens, C's)—could hold the balance of power.

However, the polls also suggest support for Podemos is faltering—from around 27 percent in November 2014, when it managed to become the number one party in Spain, to about 20 percent today.

Podemos was launched last year by the Pabloite Anti-capitalist Left (IA) group, and a handful of Stalinist academics from Madrid's Complutense University, led by 36-year-old professor and TV pundit Pablo Iglesias on a programme of left-sounding “anti-capitalist” demands.

The party's rapid rise was a sign of the volatile political situation and the collapse in support for the PP and PSOE through which the class struggle had been suppressed for decades after the transition from the fascist regime of General Francisco Franco to bourgeois democracy in 1975-78.

One of the reasons for the drop in support for Podemos is the apparent transfer of disaffected PP voters attracted to Iglesias's tirades against the corrupt “caste” to Citizens, a nine-year-old party that began life in Catalonia as an anti-independence party but became a national party last year and is now polling around 14 percent. Citizens leader Albert Rivera employs anti-corruption rhetoric similar to Iglesias, but is more

acceptable to sections of big business and the media which have heavily promoted the party—earning it the nickname “the Ibex 35 party” after the Madrid stock exchange index.

A key Citizens policy is the creation of a single work contract in Spain to replace the current two-tier system. The aim is to bring the relatively better pay and conditions of generally older workers on permanent contracts down to the levels of those on cheaper temporary contracts, a quest the Spanish employers' federation, CEOE, has been pursuing for years.

The major factor in Podemos's declining support, however, is the junking of virtually all its “anti-capitalist” demands. Calls to overthrow the “1978 regime” and establish a republic have been dropped. Restructuring the €61 billion bank bailout from the European Union has taken the place of non-payment and exiting the euro is no longer mentioned.

Podemos has abandoned its promise to nationalise key sectors of the economy and ban redundancies in profitable companies, public subsidies to private (charter) schools, temporary job agencies and evictions (proposing instead the provision of alternative housing). It has reneged on its promise to cut the retirement age from 65 to 60 and to establish universal basic state wages and rent. At the same time, Podemos has adopted the vocabulary classically associated with far-right politics—praising the Church, the monarchy and the army.

On April 30, co-founder Juan Carlos Monedero resigned from the number-three position in Podemos, warning that it was becoming like the parties it was seeking to replace. “If we lose this window of opportunity, it will be terrible: we would be betraying a

lot of people who believed that we represented change,” Monedero declared.

Monedero’s resignation was linked to his failure to declare around €425,000 allegedly earned as an adviser to various “Bolivarian” countries in Latin American. The revelation was a gift to the press, which hammered Podemos for being as corrupt as the parties it criticised and for being in the pay of dictatorial regimes.

Iglesias responded to Monedero’s resignation declaring, “As you can imagine, it’s enormously painful. For me Juan Carlos is not only a long-standing teammate, he is also one of my best friends and he has been and still is a key figure for our political careers and of course for Podemos.”

Josep Maria Antentas, sociology professor and leading Pabloite, writing in *International Viewpoint* on May 8, also warned about the search for “centre” votes. He declared, “The challenge is for Podemos to continue to set the political agenda by placing proposals and issues on the table to highlight its uniqueness and its credibility as an agent of democratic and social change.”

Unsurprisingly, Antentas made no reference to the fact that the Pabloites bear direct responsibility for the rightward lurch of Podemos. Under pressure from the Iglesias faction which demanded Podemos members drop dual membership in another party, Anticapitalists was dissolved. Subsequently, half of the organisation in Andalusia was expelled for opposing the dissolution. They complained that Anticapitalist’s “achievements” of “getting some parliamentary positions, as in the case of Teresa Rodriguez in Andalusia, or replacing Miguel Urbán in the European Parliament, have been at the cost of completely abandoning the defence of an anticapitalist programme.”

They go on, “It has accepted uncritically the turn to the ‘centre’ expressed by the direction of Pablo Iglesias, who is guiding Podemos towards an impasse that will disappoint the sectors hardest hit by the crisis, while losing the battle for hegemony in the centre of the political scene after the upsurge of the liberal right of Citizens.”

The belated complaints of the Andalusian Anticapitalists bear out the warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site* when Podemos first emerged that, like its counterpart in Greece, Syriza, it was a pro-capitalist party that would inevitably betray, then attack

the working class. Iglesias has repeatedly insisted that he is willing to make any kind of political alliance, including with explicitly right-wing forces. In a statement declaring that he would consider deals with both the PSOE and the PP, he said, “We are not sectarian. On programmatic issues, we will not have problems with anyone.”

The role of Podemos has been to steer mass anger into the dead end of electing new bourgeois governments and a mechanism for the affluent middle class layers inside Podemos to join “the caste” they claim to abhor.



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