

Spanish regional elections mark further break-up of two main parties

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Elections in 13 of Spain's 17 regions and more than 8,100 municipalities registered a broad rejection of the main parties that have dominated Spanish politics since the death of fascist dictator General Francisco Franco in 1975.

The combined vote of the ruling right-wing Popular Party (PP) and the opposition Socialist Party (PSOE) plummeted to 52 percent from 65 percent in 2011.

Although the PP finished first, it slumped from 37 percent four years ago to 27 percent, losing two-and-a-half million votes. It lost its major strongholds in the regions of Extremadura, Castilla-La Mancha and Valencia, as well as other regions where it had ruled as a minority, including Aragón and the Balearic Islands.

In the capital, Madrid, which the PP has ruled for the past 24 years, the party's high-profile, hard-line candidate Esperanza Aguirre lost her majority. General Secretary María Dolores de Cospedal lost her majority in Castilla-La Mancha, despite having passed an electoral law that favoured the PP.

The PSOE remained the second party, with 25 percent of the vote. Its total fell two percent, or 700,000 votes, as compared to 2011. In the big cities—Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Zaragoza—it lost its position as the main "left" party.

The result represents a popular rejection of the austerity policies pursued by both parties in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. It also reflects popular anger over corruption scandals that have engulfed the two main bourgeois parties, which are widely seen as instruments of the financial aristocracy.

The United Left (IU), led by the Communist Party, has virtually collapsed. In the local elections, the IU vote dropped by a third from nearly 1.5 million in 2011 to one million today. The party lost all of its seats in Madrid City and in the regions of Valencia, Madrid and

Extremadura.

In Extremadura, the IU was punished for forming a de-facto coalition with the minority PP regional government, which slashed education and health care services.

The main beneficiaries of the elections were the pseudo-left Podemos and other parties that sprung from the 15-M youth protest movement in 2011, along with the right-wing, "anti-corruption" Ciudadanos (Citizens) party.

Citizens began as an anti-independence party in Catalonia nine years ago but became a national party last year. In the municipal elections, it became the third political force. Heavily promoted by the media and benefiting from the PP's corruption scandals, Citizens obtained 1.5 million votes and secured posts for 1,527 councillors and 75 regional deputies.

The party, nicknamed "the Ibex 35 party" after the Madrid stock exchange index, aims at replacing the PP as the main party of big business. Its economic programme tracks the demands of the Spanish employers' federation, CEOE, and was written by neoliberals linked to the Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies (FAES).

The pseudo-left Podemos benefited from the collapse of both major parties and the IU. It stood under its own name at the national level but at the local level was part of "popular unity" coalitions.

In Madrid City, Ahora Madrid (Madrid Now), a coalition of Podemos, Greens and Stalinists created in March and led by former judge Manuela Carmena, was able to win 20 seats, compared to the PP's 21. Carmena could become mayor if she secures the PSOE's support.

In the region of Madrid, Podemos obtained 27 deputies, and there is talk of a coalition government

involving the PSOE and Citizens. Podemos regional candidate José Manuel López has made it clear that “we will talk with everyone,” including the Citizens party.

In Barcelona, Spain’s second-largest city, the Barcelona en Comú (Together Barcelona) coalition of Podemos, Greens, IU and various protest movements elected 11 councillors, one more than its main rival, the nationalist Convergence and Union (CiU). The seats of Barcelona en Comú, together with those of the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), the PSOE’s Catalan sister party PSC, and the Popular Unity Candidates party (CUP), total 23, enough to form the next city government, with Barcelona en Comú leader Ada Colau becoming mayor.

Colau is a former spokesperson of the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Mortgage Victims Platform—PAH), which emerged as a protest against the huge number of evictions in Spain. Colau and the pseudo-left parties strangled this opposition by channelling it into pressuring the PP government to pass laws to halt evictions and promoting illusions in the European Court of Justice. In 2014, at least 95 families were evicted every day.

Colau stated that “citizens’ candidatures, like Barcelona en Comú, were created to put an end to the unsustainable situation, which risks instability and chaos. We will guarantee basic rights ... precisely to ensure stability in the area of citizenship.”

However, these “citizens” or “popular unity” candidatures offer no perspective for the working class. As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted last July, when Colau set up Guanyem Barcelona (Let’s Win Barcelona), the predecessor of Barcelona en Comú, “The new party is designed to divert the opposition of the Spanish working class into another cul-de-sac. Its formation, on a thoroughly unprincipled and opportunist basis, is proof of the bankruptcy of the politics of ‘autonomy’ and horizontalism which accompanied the anti-evictions protests and the Indignados movement with which it was closely linked.”

Before the elections, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias railed against austerity and the “caste”—the parties of the post-Franco era—but in Barcelona, Podemos will have to ally with those very forces if it is to form a government. The PSC and ERC ruled Catalonia in a

coalition government from 2003 to 2010, slashing €1.6 billion from public services. The ERC has propped up the right-wing nationalist CiU government in Catalonia, which has imposed €6 billion in austerity cuts.



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