

# Catalan separatists secure majority in regional elections

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29 September 2015

Separatist parties won in last Sunday's regional elections, which they advanced as a plebiscite on Catalonia's independence from Spain.

However, they only obtained slightly more than 48 percent of the votes.

Together for Yes (Junt pel Si)—the main separatist coalition comprising the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC) led by former Catalan President Artur Mas, the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), the Democrats of Catalonia and the Movement of the Left—obtained 62 seats, six short of an absolute majority in the 135-seat parliament.

Prior to the elections, the leaders of these organisations announced their intention to break away from Spain within 18 months by issuing a unilateral declaration on independence if they earned an absolute majority in Sunday's elections. Mas told the crowd after the results were announced, "We will not let up. We have won despite having everything against us, and this gives us enormous strength and great legitimacy to carry this project forward."

At his side was Oriol Junqueras, leader of the Catalan Republican Left, who declared, "The 'yes' option has won in votes and in seats ... We have a more than sufficient majority to forge ahead with independence for Catalonia."

Behind the nationalist fanfare, the truth is that the combined vote of the ERC and CDC has fallen compared to the last regional elections, from a combined 71 seats in 2012, to the current 62. Only in the more rural provinces of Lleida and Girona did they obtain a majority of votes, compared to the urban Barcelona and Tarragona that comprises 85 percent of the population in the region.

Both parties are responsible for savage attacks on education, health care and other social expenditure,

where cuts have been imposed of 20 percent or more. This has led to a huge growth in poverty in the richest region in Spain, which now affects 2.2 million Catalans, nearly 30 percent of the regional population.

Together for Yes depends on the support of the pseudo-leftist Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), which gained 10 seats, from its previous three, by exploiting anti-austerity sentiment. Since 2012, it has emerged as the most consistent pro-separatist force, seeking to deceive workers with claims that an independent Catalonia would restore and improve social services and wages.

In 2014, the CUP agreed to hold a referendum on independence with the ruling Union and Convergence Catalan government, ERC and ICV, putting aside its previous anti-austerity rhetoric to, in the words of CUP deputy Quim Arrufat, "assume the same responsibilities, set aside our own interests and allow the Catalans to vote on November 9."

After the referendum was suspended by the Constitutional Court, Mas defied the court by calling a "participative process" in which 80 percent of the nearly 2.3 million who voted backed secession, but with a turnout of little more than 37 percent. CUP leader David Fernández infamously hugged Mas on the day, even as he accused Mas of "watering down" the independence process.

During the campaign, the CUP denounced the parties of Together for Yes for their imposition of austerity, but its candidate Antonio Baños called for a "national unity government" in order to carry out the unilateral declaration on independence. On the night of the elections results, Baños declared, "Starting from tomorrow Spanish legislation must and will be disobeyed by the Catalan people ... Catalan sovereignty will disobey all laws that go against Catalonia."

Conscious of the unpopularity of the Mas government's austerity and corruption among working layers who have voted for the CUP, another leader of the CUP, Anna Gabriel, declared, "Mr. Mas is not indispensable," opening the door to voting for a Together for Yes government without Mas.

The Citizens party is the second biggest in the Catalan chamber, with 25 seats, becoming the main opposition party for the first time. It trebled its votes and became the main anti-secessionist party by benefitting from the collapse of the traditional opposition party in the region.

The Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC) obtained just 16 seats. Even l'Hospitalet de Llobregat, a working class PSC stronghold on the outskirts of Barcelona, went to Citizens.

Citizens also benefitted from the collapse of the right-wing anti-secessionist Popular Party (PP) that obtained 11 seats and 8.5 percent of the vote. Citizens began as an anti-secessionist party in Catalonia in 2006, but became a national party last year and was the third political force in the municipal elections. Nicknamed the "Ibex 35 party" after the Madrid stock exchange index, the party aims at replacing the PP as the main party of big business. Its economic programme at the national level tracks the demands of the Spanish employers' federation, CEOE, and was written by neo-liberals linked to the Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies (FAES).

Albert Rivera, leader of Citizens, said that "the first thing is to get Artur Mas to resign." Catalonia is probably heading for early elections, he added, because of the upcoming difficulties in forming a new government if the CUP does not support Together for Yes.

Catalonia Yes We Can, a coalition comprising the Catalan group of the pseudo-left, Podemos, called Podem, Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV) and the Stalinist-led United and Alternative Left (EUiA), obtained 11 seats, two seats below what ICV-EUiA obtained in 2012.

Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias said the results were "highly disappointing". The coalition put "responsibility" before "electoralism", he added. The mistake has been to put "social rights" and "the need for the Catalans to enjoy basic public services" before Mas's "austericide". "If this is our mistake, we will

continue to make it," he added rhetorically.

This claim has no substance. Its claims to be the main anti-austerity party were completely hypocritical, taking into account that their new brand is as rotten as each of their component organisations. ICV and the Stalinist EUiA participated in the 2006-2010 regional government that implemented €1.6 billion in cuts. Its sister party throughout Spain, the United Left, has supported PP and Socialist Party (PSOE) regional governments in Andalusia, Extremadura and Asturias that have implemented cuts.

As for Podemos, talk of "austericide" cannot hide the fact that Iglesias fully backed its sister party Syriza in Greece agreeing to impose mass austerity. He even broke off from his own party's election campaign to support Syriza Prime Minister Alexis Tispras in the Greek elections.

The results of the Catalan elections have also fuelled separatist aspirations in the Basque Country, where the regional president Iñigo Urkullu warned the Spanish government that apart from Catalonia, "they also have a problem in Euskadi" [the Basque Country]". He said this was because of its "recentralizing attempts" and "not fulfilling the agreements"—in reference to the powers that have yet to be transferred to the region.

Spanish PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has reacted by stating that he wants "dialogue", but will not accept any talks that question the "unity of Spain and national sovereignty".

In the months prior to the elections, the PP government put in place legal mechanisms to repress any secessionist moves by the Catalan regional government, including the strengthening of the Constitutional Court and the National Security Law. The government has threatened to utilise Article 155 of the Constitution that would suspend the Catalan government and possibly even send in the army.



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