

Fascist Vox party makes substantial gains in Andalusia elections

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4 December 2018

The results of the regional election in Andalusia herald the open return of fascism to Spanish politics, 43 years after the death of dictator General Francisco Franco in 1975 and the transition to democracy.

The Vox party, which only decided to stand candidates at the last minute, won 12 seats in the 108-seat Andalusian parliament and almost 11 percent of the vote compared to zero seats and 0.46 percent in 2015.

It is highly likely that the party will enter the regional government in the role of kingmaker, as it holds the key to forming a new coalition administration with the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and Citizens party. The PP candidate for regional president, Juan Manuel Moreno, and for Citizens, Juan Marín, are already talking about forming a government that includes Vox.

The head of the National Rally (formerly the National Front) in France, Marine Le Pen, tweeted, “My warmest congratulations to our friends in Vox who tonight in Spain have obtained a very significant result for a young and dynamic movement.”

Vox was founded by Francoist members of the PP in 2013. Its policies include the suspension of Catalan regional autonomy, the banning of parties and other organisations that “promote the destruction of [Spanish] territorial unity and its sovereignty”, reversing limited measures relating to Franco’s crimes, closing mosques, bolstering the Catholic Church, lowering income and corporate tax, and deporting migrants.

It isn’t that there has been a groundswell of support for such reactionary policies—the huge abstention rate of almost 46 percent indicates the widespread opposition to all the official parties. Those who usually vote for the Socialist Party (PSOE) and Unidos Podemos (the pseudo-left Podemos and Stalinist United

Left [IU]) stayed home. The decline in participation, the lowest since 1990, was especially strong in PSOE working class heartlands, such as the provinces of Seville or Jaén and the Seville municipalities of Alcalá de Guadaíra or Dos Hermanas.

This political alienation is fuelled by desperate social hardship. Unemployment remains at 23 percent (eight points higher than the national average) with youth unemployment at a staggering 47.3 percent (versus the national average of 34.7 percent). The risk of poverty and social exclusion in Andalusia is 37.3 percent, affecting more than 3.1 million people. Nearly 10 percent of the population are “severely” poor, which means that more than 1 million Andalusians survive on less than €300 per month.

Vox leader Santiago Abascal said the party’s surprise result had shaken the PSOE, which has ruled the region for decades and provided an “opportunity to evict communism and corruption from Andalusia.”

“The Reconquista begins in Andalusia and will be extended to the rest of Spain,” the party tweeted.

Although the PP suffered its second-worst ever drop in votes—26 seats, down from 33—it declared, “We are euphoric. This is historic.” Party leaders were not only jubilant that the “sorpaso” (overtaking) threatened by Ciudadanos—up from 9 to 21—had not materialised and the PP has the possibility of being in power in Andalusia. They welcomed the gains made by Vox.

“The monopoly of a single party has ended, I am going to immediately start working and speaking with all the forces and groups with the aim of reaching an alternative majority to the PSOE,” Moreno insisted.

Marín declared, “Change has arrived in Andalusia. ... There are enough deputies to force a change.” The party’s national leader, Albert Rivera, said, “We are going to throw the PSOE out. ...”

After 36 years of uninterrupted rule in the region, the PSOE has suffered its worst-ever defeat. It remains the biggest party, keeping hold of 33 seats and 28 percent of the vote, but slumped from 47 seats and 35.4 percent of the vote. PSOE regional chief Susana Díaz brought forward elections scheduled for next March to last Sunday, believing polls that indicated an easy win for the PSOE. Instead, the PSOE's 33 seats, combined with the 17 of the Unidos Podemos electoral front Adelanta Andalucía, also down from 20 seats, is short of an absolute majority of 55 seats.

The dramatic drop in support for the PSOE and Unidos Podemos comes just six months after PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez Sánchez deposed Mariano Rajoy and his PP government, which the PSOE had kept in power. In a no-confidence motion backed by Unidos Podemos and regional nationalists, the PSOE came to power as a minority government. Soon after, polls began indicating a growth, by as much as 10 percent to 32 percent, in support for the PSOE thanks to its promises to end austerity and implement progressive social measures. PSOE officials not only confidentially spoke of winning in Andalusia. Sánchez also hinted he might call snap elections for May 2019.

The PSOE's optimism was boosted after Sánchez announced a new budget for 2019, which promised to raise the minimum wage to €900 a month from €736, or 22 percent—the biggest hike in 40 years—and pledged increases in pensions, education spending, unemployment benefits, housing and paternity leave, and taxes on the rich.

Podemos, which has been seeking a lasting alliance with the PSOE, hailed this as proof of a left turn by Sanchez under its influence. However, just two weeks before the Andalusian election, Sánchez announced that he would not present the 2019 budget to parliament because of opposition from the Catalan nationalists—after state attorneys confirmed sedition charges against separatist leaders for declaring independence last year.

This was a de facto pledge to implement the 2018 austerity budget drafted by the Rajoy government and including massive cuts to public services. The illusions cultivated by Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias that “co-governing” with the PSOE was “a starting point for a new period in Spanish economic policy” lay in tatters, instead opening the door to the fascist right.

This has not changed Podemos's political orientation whatsoever. Its response to Vox's gains was to call for an “anti-fascist front” and for the Catalan nationalists to stop blocking the PSOE's 2019 budget—warning, “Not only is the General Budget at stake, but also the leadership of the State.”

Iglesias said he hoped “That this result will help the PSOE understand that we need to be its allies and that the Catalan forces understand that we are dealing with the future of our country.”

Podemos regional head in Andalusia Teresa Rodríguez, a leading member of the Pabloite Anticapitalistas, blamed Díaz for the PSOE's defeat thanks to her not putting “us in your bloc.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* warned in October, “There is deep, historically rooted opposition in the working class in Spain and internationally to fascism. However, to the extent that the working class remains subordinated to the PSOE and Podemos there is a real danger of VOX rising.”

The election campaign confirmed this warning, so that Vox, amid its denunciations of the PSOE for seeking an accommodation with the Catalan separatists, attempted a populist appeal to the “humble man” against the “the privileged, the well-to-do.” Abascal declared, “It is precisely the workers, the middle class, the people who have the most difficulties on a daily basis, who most need the country, who most need society with its roots anchored.”



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