

Fascistic Vox party surges in Spanish election as hung parliament emerges

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The pro-fascist Vox party surged into third place in national elections in Spain Sunday, doubling its presence from 24 to 52 seats in the Congress as a hung parliament emerged for the fourth straight election in Spain since 2015.

Abstention rose to over 30 percent, after a reactionary election campaign oriented around calls for violent police repression of mass protests in Catalonia against the jailing of Catalan nationalists for organizing peaceful protests and a peaceful referendum on Catalan independence in 2017. With tacit support from the pseudo-left Podemos party, the caretaker Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) government pledged a violent crackdown on the protests. This strengthened Vox and the right-wing Popular Party (PP).

The PSOE took 28 percent of the vote and 120 seats, the PP 21 percent (88 seats), Vox 15 percent (52 seats), Podemos 13 percent (35 seats), the right-wing Citizens party 7 percent (10 seats). The PSOE and Podemos both lost over a half-million votes, while Vox won a million more votes and the PP 600,000 more votes than in the last elections.

The Citizens party fell 9 percent, losing 2.6 million votes. The collapse of the vote for Citizens, a right-wing party founded to oppose Catalan separatism, came as Spanish media gave wall-to-wall coverage to Vox leader Santiago Abascal. An open supporter of fascist dictator Francisco Franco's army and its record of mass murder of left wing workers during the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War, Abascal outflanked Citizens on the right, calling for military repression and executions in Catalonia.

Regional nationalist parties maintained their presence in the Congress, as Catalan voters delivered a vote for Catalan nationalist parties despite the deployment of a large force of 4,500 police and Civil Guards to oversee

the election in Catalonia. The Republican Left of Catalonia won 13 seats, Together for Catalonia 8, the Basque National Party 7, and the Basque-nationalist EH Bildu 5. The Catalan petty-bourgeois Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP) won 2 seats while More Country, a pro-PSOE split-off from Podemos led by Inigo Errejon, won 3.

The result is a fourth hung parliament in as many elections since 2015. Neither the PSOE nor the PP, the bourgeoisie's two traditional parties of government since the 1978 Transition from the Francoite dictatorship to parliamentary rule, have enough seats to obtain an absolute majority of 176 in the 350-seat Congress. Even with their traditional allies, such as Podemos for the PSOE or Citizens or Vox for the PP, they would not reach the 176-seat limit.

For a time last year, amid growing public opposition to police violence in Catalonia following the October 2017 independence referendum, PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez assembled an unstable governing majority with Podemos, backed by the Catalan nationalists. However, the Catalan nationalists refused to vote the PSOE's austerity budget this year, as anger mounted in Catalonia over the show trial of Catalan nationalist political prisoners. This brought down the PSOE government this winter.

When the PSOE held new elections in April, hoping to strengthen its position, a new hung parliament emerged instead. No government ever emerged from those elections. The PSOE engaged in failed government talks with Podemos, which ultimately declined to join it, fearing that it would be discredited if it were in government with the PSOE when it handed out harsh prison sentences to the Catalan political prisoners. In September, the PSOE ultimately called these new elections, which have also produced a hung

parliament.

Talks attempting to nevertheless form a government will now begin. The Spanish right-wing media are leading a campaign calling for a Grand Coalition PSOE-PP government, modeled on the ruling social-democratic/right-wing coalition government in Germany. A key feature of the “Grand Coalition” plan is that in both cases the main opposition party—the Alternative for Germany (AfD), or Vox in Spain—is a fascistic party.

The right-wing *El Mundo* said in an editorial last week that today, “The PSOE and the PP will be obliged to sit down at a table to address a grand coalition that allows Spain to start again and end the ungovernability.” Similarly, the right-wing *El Espanol* published an op-ed declaring, “My vote is for a grand coalition.”

Last night, PP leader Pablo Casado signaled he would be open to forming a grand coalition. “We will be very demanding with the PSOE. We will see what Pedro Sanchez now proposes and then we will be responsible, because Spain cannot continue any longer blocked without a government, hostage to his interests.”

Sanchez for his part responded to the PSOE’s electoral setback by issuing a call last night “to all the parties” to act with “responsibility and generosity” and end the blockage in Madrid. Similarly, last night, an op-ed in the pro-PSOE *El Pais* titled “Exit strategy” called for “negotiating a minimum program” with “those parties unequivocally committed to the Constitution.”

Whatever the outcome of the talks it is clear the Spanish political system as it emerged from the 1978 Transition from Francoism has suffered a deep breakdown. Discredited by decades of war and austerity since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and in particular by a decade of deep European Union (EU) austerity and mass unemployment after the 2008 Wall Street crash, it is veering ever more sharply to the right. Impervious to explosive social anger among workers, it aims instead to return to authoritarian forms of rule to suppress popular opposition.

The rise of Vox is not the product of broad popular approval of the party’s fascistic anti-Catalan agitation, let alone for Vox’s statements of support for fascist coups and mass murder. In fact, polls showed 59 percent of Spaniards opposing a confrontational policy

in Catalonia, despite the press campaign denouncing the Catalan protests.

As in the rest of Europe, the rise of the far right is driven from above, to justify military-police violence and continue increasing social inequality with social cuts and tax cuts for the rich, despite rising mass opposition. Madrid has endlessly stoked Spanish nationalism and resorts to police-state repression in Catalonia, building up the far right. The period since the crackdown in Catalonia in October 2017 has seen Vox go from a minor party obtaining less than 50,000 votes to Spain’s third-largest party.

Over the same period, Podemos lost over 2 million votes, as it endlessly called to form a coalition government with the PSOE, to block opposition to the PSOE on its left. Having abandoned its claims after its foundation in 2015 that it hoped to overtake and replace the PSOE, Podemos is manifestly politically bankrupt and in a state of collapse.

Despite the disastrous electoral results of orienting to the PSOE on the basis of promoting Spanish nationalism, Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias has pushed to continue this orientation. At his last campaign meeting he called Podemos “the only patriotic political force in Spain,” Iglesias said he was appealing to “the vote of the homeland, of the people, of a people who want democracy to defend themselves against the powerful.” This endless promotion of nationalism and the Spanish homeland by Podemos is handing the initiative within official politics to Vox.



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