

Spain: Far-right Vox poised to enter Castilla y León regional government

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Spain's far-right Vox party is poised to enter the regional government of Castilla y León after winning its best-ever regional election result on 13 February. The ruling right-wing People's Party (PP) increased its total seats by two but failed to win a parliamentary majority.

Vox won 17.6 percent of the vote and 13 seats, a dramatic increase on its 5.5 percent and one seat in the 2019 elections. While the PP returned 31 representatives to the 81-seat parliament—the most of any party—its vote share declined slightly, from 31.5 percent to 31.4 percent. It was the party's worst-ever election result in Castilla y León, historically a PP stronghold.

The Socialist Party (PSOE) gained 30.1 percent of the vote and 28 seats—seven fewer than in 2019. The right-wing Citizens party, which had ruled in coalition with the PP since 2019, collapsed from 12 representatives to one. The “left-populist” Podemos also won a single seat. The regional parties Soria ¡Ya! (Soria Now!), the Leonese People's Union and For Ávila together won seven seats.

The vote for Vox in the Castilla y León elections is another sharp warning to the working class of the neo-fascist danger in Spain. Forty-four years after the 1978 Transition from the fascist regime established by Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War, the far-right is once again on the verge of taking power in parts of Spain.

In 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, top far-right officers opposed to public health measures issued calls for a coup and mass murder, which the PSOE-Podemos government downplayed. In leaked WhatsApp chats, far-right generals, backed by Vox, call to kill “26 million” Spaniards—55 percent of Spain's population—whom they view as impossible to win to

fascism.

The snap elections in Castilla y León were called after PP regional president Alfonso Fernández Mañueco expelled Citizens from his government in December, claiming he could no longer rely on their loyalty.

Tensions had been rising in the PP-Citizens government for months due to tactical differences over the handling of the coronavirus pandemic and difficulties in pushing through the PP's budget. The snap elections were precipitated by a no-confidence motion tabled by the PSOE opposition in March 2021. Although the motion was defeated, Citizens deputy Maria Montero defected from the party before the vote, leaving the PP-Citizens coalition one member short of an absolute majority.

Mañueco had hoped to win enough votes to govern without Citizens, with opinion polls initially predicting a comfortable PP victory. But with Citizens' collapse and the PP's disappointing results, Mañueco will likely now be forced to rely on votes from Vox to form a government and push through legislation. This would be the first time Vox would enter a regional government.

While Vox has previously supported regional PP administrations from outside the government, Vox leader Santiago Abascal has demanded that the PP enter into coalition with his party in Castilla y León, stating that Mañueco would not get Vox's support “free of charge.”

“Vox has the right and the duty to form a government in Castilla y León,” Abascal declared after the elections. “We've managed to save the region from the threat of socialists and communists,” he continued. Abascal then demanded that Vox's lead candidate in the region, Juan García-Gallardo, be made regional vice-

president.

Abascal later retreated somewhat, stating: “The demand for the vice-presidency in Castilla y León was just a comment. We haven’t formally demanded anything yet.” However, he still conditioned Vox’s support on their being brought into government, declaring, “if Citizens received 14 percent of the vote in the last parliament and we’ve received 17.6 percent, we should get the same or more than Citizens.” Citizens members had held four ministries and the post of vice-president in the last government.

García-Gallardo has also ruled out Vox abstaining to tacitly back a minority PP government, declaring: “We are not going to abstain, and we are going to make our votes count.”

Mañueco initially sought to avoid forming a coalition, stating that he wants to form a “solo government” based on informal pacts with other parties. “We are not going to repeat the elections,” he said, “and there will be a strong and stable government which will emerge from a parliamentary agreement.” Initially, without specifically ruling out an alliance with Vox, he claimed he preferred to avoid it, stating: “I don’t have red lines, but I do have great principles.”

Expediency has dictated new “principles” to Mañueco in recent days, however, and current reports are that he and the PP are progressing rapidly in talks with Vox on a governmental alliance. There is “good harmony” between the PP and Vox in talks, though “the question of ministerial portfolios has not been discussed yet,” a PP source told *El Diario*, which said that it is increasingly likely that Vox will obtain the regional vice-presidency.

Other PP leaders have not hesitated to ally with Vox, with Madrid regional president Isabel Díaz Ayuso declaring in a press conference last Tuesday: “We shouldn’t care what the left thinks about our agreements.” She explicitly endorsed entering into coalition with Vox during the Madrid election campaign.

For its part, the PSOE has opened the door to an agreement with the PP, with PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez declaring that his party could abstain in an investiture vote to allow the PP to form a minority government without Vox.

“If the [PP] explains that the far-right is a danger for democracy,” Sánchez declared, “perhaps we could

come to an agreement; if they explain that we must place a *cordon sanitaire* around those who question the rights and freedoms of women and LGBTI people, perhaps we can come to an agreement. But first they must do one thing: ask all those who have made deals with the far-right in Madrid and outside of Madrid to break those agreements.”

The PP currently has agreements with Vox in Andalusia, Murcia and Madrid, making it unlikely that they will break ties with the far-right party, as they could then lose control of all these governments.

The elections in Castilla y León are significant especially insofar as they are widely considered to be a dry run for the national legislative elections, which must be held before December 2023.

A mid-February opinion poll by Electomania predicted that Vox could become the second-largest party in the 2023 elections, after the PSOE. It suggested that Vox could win as much as 22.1 percent of the vote and 84 seats, with the PP coming a close third with 83 seats and 21.7 percent of ballots. While the PSOE may be able to form an unstable coalition by relying on Podemos and a host of regional parties, a Vox-PP national government remains a distinct possibility.

No significant opposition to the rise of this fascistic party will be forthcoming from the ruling PSOE and Podemos party and their various political satellites. They have downplayed the threat posed by the far-right and acceded to virtually every demand placed on them by Vox—from its refusal to implement lockdown measures to combat the pandemic to its brutal crackdown on refugees.

The only way to fight the rise of the far-right in Spain and across Europe is for the working class to fight on the basis of its own party and programme. This requires a break with the PSOE and Podemos, as part of a struggle for socialism in Spain and internationally.



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