

Spanish right sweeps regional elections as Podemos vote collapses

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Yesterday, voters went to the polls to elect the members of 8,131 municipal councils and 17 regional legislatures in Spain. The elections were widely seen as a preview of national elections to be held in December. The right-wing Popular Party (PP) carried the elections amid rising support for the far-right Vox party, while the parties in national government, the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and the pseudo-left Podemos party, suffered a major defeat.

The PSOE lost 500,000 votes compared to the previous elections, falling from 6.7 million to 6.2 million votes, while the PP rose from 5.1 million to 6.9 million votes. The PP alone or in alliance with Vox won every major city in Spain with the exception of Barcelona. It carried Madrid, Valencia, Seville, Valladolid, Palma, Zaragoza, Cádiz, Córdoba, Granada, Huelva and Jaén.

It was a humiliating rebuke to the PSOE-Podemos government, which has championed ultra-right policies during its three years in office. Championing the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, it slashed pensions and wages, pursued a profits-over-lives policy in the COVID-19 pandemic, and massively hiked the military budget and bailouts for major banks and corporations. It also savagely attacked striking truck drivers and metal workers. The result was a collapse in its support.

The most striking feature of the elections was the complete disintegration of the vote for Podemos and its various regional allies and split-offs. Podemos lost all its councilors in Madrid, Valencia, Zaragoza, Tenerife, Burgos, Valladolid, Vigo and Coruña. In Barcelona, Podemos-backed mayor Ada Colau lost her mayorship after eight years.

A similar picture emerges from the elections to Spain's highly powerful regions, which control

spending in key public services including education, housing and health care. Of the 10 regions ruled by the PSOE which went to the polls on Sunday, it only retained Asturias and Castilla-La Mancha. The PP and Vox won in Valencia region, Aragón, Balearic Islands, Cantabria and La Rioja.

At the regional level, Podemos lost 10 regional lawmakers in the Madrid region, and eight in the Valencian parliament, the two most important at stake. Más Madrid, a split from Podemos with a strong presence in Madrid, also collapsed. It lost seven councilors in Madrid city, falling to 12. In the region of Madrid, while it won four regional lawmakers, gaining from Podemos' losses, its vote actually nonetheless dropped by around 100,000 votes.

Adelante Andalucía, a group led by the Pabloite Anticapitalistas faction of Podemos lost the mayorship of Cádiz to the PP, collapsing from 13 to six councillors and is left without representation in all the other important cities of Andalusia. The Pabloites played a treacherous role during the repression of the Cádiz metalworkers' strike in November 2021.

The election campaign was a degraded spectacle, an expression of the relentless move to the right of European bourgeois politics. The PP and the far-right Vox party have mostly absorbed the vote of liberal right-wing Citizens. In 2019, Citizens obtained 1.9 million votes, while yesterday it barely received 300,000. Podemos and its various split-offs avoided any discussion on the war and social inequality, centering their campaign on identity politics and issues promoted by the far-right.

The first week of the two-week campaign was dominated by denunciations of the largely extinct Basque armed group ETA, which ceased to exist 12 years ago. However, EH Bildu, a Basque separatist

party, fielded candidates who previously belonged to the petty-bourgeois group. ETA's terror attacks, and even existence, were used for decades as an opportunity to clamp down on democratic rights.

While the PP and Vox called to outlaw Bildu, the PSOE and Podemos participated in this right-wing charade. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez described Bildu's move as "legal, but not decent" and the deputy of Podemos for Vizcaya, Roberto Uriarte, demanded that those convicted of "blood crimes" be withdrawn.

The second week was dominated by the "squatting problem," denouncing squatters to cover the real issue of housing affordability and the lack of rental housing. High rents, coupled with poor salaries and job precariousness, prevent many youth from leaving their parents' homes.

The political periphery of Podemos participated in this debate, calling for police action against squatters. In an interview with right-wing daily *El Mundo*, Rita Maestre, candidate for mayor to Madrid for a Podemos split-off, More Madrid, said that "squatting is illegal and creates problems for social harmony." Maestre infamously called it "a pleasure and a pride" for Madrid to host the NATO summit last year, where the main imperialist powers plotted war on Russia and China.

In Barcelona, Podemos-backed mayor Colau endorsed police repression, after a video emerged showing municipal riot police beating two after-school activities educators. Colau, once dubbed a "mayor of change," is notorious for slashing spending, attacking striking public transport workers and persecuting migrants.

Last year, she met far-right Mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klichkó, in Ukraine, committing aid money and fire trucks, while denouncing Putin's "crimes against humanity" and exclaiming, "Ukraine is Europe."

Throughout the campaign, Podemos and its new split-off, Sumar, doubled down on identity politics. Yolanda Díaz, deputy prime minister and future candidate for the general elections in December, participated in an election debate on prime-time television. Congratulating herself that only women were attending the debate, she said, "men are bred to fight in wars. They are very warrior-like," adding that heterosexual men are boring.

Díaz is part of a government that is training and

arming Ukrainian soldiers to fight Russia on NATO's behalf, while doubling the presence of Spanish troops in Eastern Europe.

On COVID-19, Podemos centered its criticism of right-wing regional premier of Madrid, Isabel Ayuso, on corruption, rather than the profits-for-lives policy in the region that killed over 11,000 elderly people. They were left to die in the cruelest conceivable way in nursing homes. Podemos was silent on this, however, as it implemented the same policy at the national level, costing 160,000 lives and millions of infections.

The regional elections were widely interpreted as setting the stage for the general election to be held in December. The survival of the PSOE-Podemos government is now highly questionable. There is also the possibility of a far-right coalition of the conservative Popular Party (PP) and the neo-fascist Vox taking power—the first time the far-right would return to power since the collapse of General Franco's fascist dictatorship in the 1970s.

There is explosive, left-wing opposition in the working class to the policies of the PSOE-Podemos government. However, in the vacuum created to the left of Podemos by pseudo-left parties that support Podemos and work to block the formation of any organization challenging Podemos on its left, the possibility of a right-wing victory is real and growing.

Defeating the European bourgeoisie's turn to war and fascistic politics requires building a Trotskyist revolutionary vanguard in the working class to overcome the counterrevolutionary role of parties like Podemos. The only way to fight war, pauperisation and the rise of the far-right 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, and a struggle to build sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International fighting for socialism in Spain and internationally.



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