

The People's Party running favourite in the next parliamentary elections in Spain in which the populist left might draw ahead of the socialists

Corinne Deloy

Analysis

Spain, which has been governed since the return of democracy in 1975, alternately by two main parties, the People's Party (PP) and the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), with the support of the regionalist parties when the PP or the PSOE failed to achieve the absolute majority, awoke to a fragmented parliament on 20th December last with this divided into four main parts – the People's Party, led by outgoing Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy (28.92% of the vote 123 MPs), the PSOE (22.16%, 90 MPs), Podemos (20.83%, 69 MPs) and Ciudadanos (C's) (13.7%, 40 MPs) – a result that made the formation of a new government rather difficult.

IMPOSSIBLE TO FORM A GOVERNMENT

Mariano Rajoy fought feebly to rally a majority to his name. He said he supported a "grand coalition" that would bring his party and the PSOE together. *"It was not possible because the socialists did not want it. They did not even want to talk to us,"* he maintained in explanation of his failure. In reality Mariano Rajoy had counted on the immediate organisation of new parliamentary elections. Although the leader of Ciudadanos, Alberto Rivero, was prepared to work with the People's Party, he was however against the involvement of Mariano Rajoy as head of the future government. *"You embody institutionalised corruption, Mr Rajoy. With you any type of democratic revival is a pious wish,"* he declared to the outgoing Prime Minister.

On 2nd February last, after Mariano Rajoy's refusal to stand for investiture, socialist leader Pedro Sanchez started along the path for investiture as head of government, asking for the support of Ciudadanos and Podemos. The latter party immediately demanded the deputyship of the government for its leaders Pablo Iglesias, half of the ministries

(including the creation of a "multi-nationality" ministry) or to be more precise, the composition of a government that was proportional to the results of the parliamentary elections on 20th December, the promise of additional social spending and especially the organisation of a referendum on self-rule in Catalonia, a measure against which the socialists and members of Ciudadanos were totally opposed. An agreement signed by the two parties was also against *"any bid to convene a referendum with the aim of self-rule of any territory in the kingdom"*. Finally Pablo Iglesias's party vetoed Ciudadanos's participation in the negotiations, deemed in its opinion to be the "new People's Party."

Launched on 7th April last, negotiations between the three parties failed. Pablo Iglesias surprised everyone by demanding that the 400,000 members of his party express their opinion between 14th and 16th April on the answer to give to the proposed coalition. Finally 88.2% of Podemos's supporters voted against a government founded on the investiture agreement signed between the Secretary General of the PSOE, Pedro Sanchez and the Chairman of Ciudadanos, Alberto Rivera. Around 150,000 people took part in

the election, i.e. ten times more than in the vote in November 2015 on *Podemos*'s electoral programme.

"In fact Podemos has no interest in joining forces with the socialists. The real goal is to do a 'sorpasso' i.e. get ahead of the PSOE as in Greece where the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) has been supplanted by the United Left Coalition (SYRIZA); they want to eliminate the PSOE. They want new parliamentary elections, convinced that their electorate will increase and that they will become the only true opposition on the left," stressed the journalist of the daily *El Pais* Patxo Unzueta. *"The PSOE has overestimated its strength. By joining forces with Ciudadanos, Pedro Sanchez thought that he would put pressure on Podemos presented as a locking force, against all change. It thought that it would capitulate but it did not understand that Podemos was fighting over its hegemony of the left and could not accept to be a passive bystander,"* analyses Pablo Simon, professor of Political Science at the University Carlos III in Madrid.

Pedro Sanchez accused the leader of *Podemos* of having prevented the formation of a left-wing government. *"Pablo Iglesias never wanted an alliance with the socialists,"* he declared. The latter answered that the socialists had preferred to come to agreement with *Ciudadanos*.

"There are no candidates who enjoy the vital support for the Congress of Deputies (lower house of parliament) to be able to grant them confidence," declared King Felipe VI on 26th April last. According to the Spanish constitution, the parliament absolutely has to appoint a Prime Minister within the two months following the first vote by the Congress of Deputies on the formation of a government. This took place on 2nd March last. Felipe VI refused to appoint a new candidate after Pedro Sanchez's failure on 4th March indicating that the parties had to be able to put forward an agreement proposal to be able to ask for the MPs' vote. The King clearly tried to distance himself from the parties. For the first time in the history of Spanish democracy the Cortes Generales, i.e. the two houses of parliament comprising the Congress of Deputies and the Senate were dissolved on 3rd May last by the king and not by the Prime Minister.

A SNAP ELECTION

On 9th May last *Podemos* finalised its agreement with the *United Left* (Izquierda Unida, IU). The two parties will be standing together on 26th June next under the banner *Unidos Podemos*, with a programme of 50 measures including tax reform, the introduction of a guaranteed minimum revenue and the repeal of the labour market reform introduced by Mariano Rajoy's government.

Both parties hope that the combined number of votes for them will help them benefit from a voting system that fosters the "biggest" parties. *"In politics arithmetical additions rarely work. Voters supporting the United Left, who are disappointed by this pact will abstain or do the opposite - if there is significant left-right polarisation in the electoral campaign, the coalition between Podemos and the United left will be stronger than in the previous parliamentary elections,"* indicated Fernando Vallespin, professor of political science at the Autonomous University of Madrid.

The leader of the United Left, Alberto Garzon did however succeed in ensuring that his party would undertake its own electoral campaign and maintain its independence in the future parliament.

Pablo Iglesias plans to become the next President of the Government (Prime Minister). *"His goal is the conquest of central government,"* indicates political expert Joan Subirats. *"He is trying to beat the PSOE rather than try to enter in a political game which would mean negotiations,"* stresses Daniel Innerarity, director of the *think tank* Globernance.

"If the socialists succeed in standing as radical centrists, which represent the majority of Spain, which does not want either adventures with Podemos, nor the immobility of the People's Party, then they can improve their score," deems Fernando Vallespin. Otherwise *Podemos* could achieve the 'sorpasso' and beat the PSOE.

In this kind of situation the socialists would then have the alternative between supporting of a government formed by the People's Party, i.e. reappointing Mariano Rajoy as Prime Minister whom Pedro Sanchez has qualified as "dishonest" and of being "rancid, corrupt, anti-social right-wing", thereby possibly strengthening

Podemos, which would then become the main opposition party, or to enter a crisis and head towards further parliamentary elections. "There will not be a third election," declared Pedro Sanchez on 27th May. Are we to understand that the PSOE is also prepared, if it fails, to join forces with Podemos?

On 17th May last Pedro Sanchez intervened to prevent Ximo Puig (PSOE), President of the Region of Valencia from joining forces with Podemos and another party Compromiso, with the aim of standing on a single list in the Senatorial elections in this south-eastern region of Spain.

"The electoral campaign will be marked by accusations, especially within each block – PSOE and Podemos on the one hand, the People's Party and Ciudadanos on the other," believes Pablo Simon. "If Unidos Podemos

draws ahead of PSOE, this will favour the People's Party because it will be difficult for the socialists to support a Podemos government. We cannot rule out either that this time one of the two blocks, left or right will draw close to the absolute majority, which will facilitate investiture," stresses the political expert, concluding: "We cannot have a third election. Whether they like it or not, the parties will have to come to agreement."

According to the most recent poll by IBES, published on 26th May the People's Party is due to come out ahead on 26th June with 30% of the vote, followed by Unidos Podemos with 25%, 5 points ahead of the PSOE therefore (20%). Ciudadanos is due to win 14% of the vote. The most recent polls show a rise in abstention. This might strengthen Mariano Rajoy's People's Party.

Reminders of parliamentary elections results on 20th December 2015 in Spain

Congress of Deputies (Turnout: 69,67%)

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes cast	Number of seats
People's Party (PP)	7 236 965	28,92	123
Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	5 545 315	22,16	90
Podemos (P)	5 212 711	20,83	69
Ciudadanos (C's)	3 514 528	14,05	40
Others	3 513 662	13,70	28

Source : http://www.juntaelectoralcentral.es/cs/jec/documentos/GENERALES_2015_Resultados.pdf

Parliamentary elections in Spain26th June 2016**Senate**

Political Parties	Number of Seats
People's Party (PP)	124
Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	47
Podemos (P)	16
Republican Left of Catalunya Sí (ERC-CAT SÍ)	6
Democracy and Liberty (DL)	6
Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV)	6
Cambio-Aldaketa	1
Canaries Coalition (CC)	1
Gomerian Socialist Group (ASG)	1
Others	0

Source : http://www.juntaelectoralcentral.es/cs/jec/documentos/GENERALES_2015_Resultados.pdf

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