

Elections in Spain: A Political Change in the Framework of a Major International Crisis

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Spain's early general election on 20 November marked a turning point in the political landscape. The Socialists were trounced by the conservative Popular Party (PP), in their worst-ever electoral defeat since the country returned to democracy after the death of General Franco in 1975, and the PP achieved its best-ever result.

The main reason for the Socialists' defeat was the depth of Spain's economic and financial crisis and the mishandling of it by the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate of 22.6% at the time of the election, which was not due to be held until March 2012, was the same as it was when the PP last took power in 1996 and more than double the rate (10.4%) when Zapatero first took office in 2004.

The PP, led by Mariano Rajoy, increased its number of seats in the lower house of parliament from 154 in 2008 to 186, giving it the second largest absolute majority in the 350-seat Congress since 1977, after the Socialists' victory of 202 seats in 1982, while the Socialists, under the veteran politician Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, dropped from 169 to 110 seats (see Table 2). Voter turnout was 71.7%, down from 75.8% in 2008. Zapatero did not run for a third term.

This was the third time Rajoy had led the PP into an election, after being defeated in 2008 and 2004. His party is firmly in control not only at the central government level, but also regionally and locally, as it also won a resounding victory in the May municipal and regional elections. As a result of those elections, the PP control 11 of the 17 regional governments

and three of the four biggest cities (Madrid, Valencia and Seville).

The Socialists lost 4.3 million votes in the general election, but the PP only gained 560,000. The Socialists also lost votes in all of Spain's 17 autonomous regions, including Andalusia, their fiefdom, while the PP gained votes in all of them except in Asturias, Navarra and the Basque Country. Because of the way the d'Hondt system, or highest average method, works, the PP won 32 more seats and the Socialists lost 59. Voters deserted the Socialists mainly for the hard-line United Left (IU) of Cayo Lara, which increased its number of seats from two to 11 (+720,000 votes), and the Progress and Democratic Union (UPyD) of Rosa Díez, which won five seats (+840,000 votes), four more than in 2008.

The Socialists' vote, as a proportion of the total population, was 20.3%, slightly lower than the 20.7% gained by the PP in the watershed election of 1982, when the Socialists came to power for the first time after the death of General Franco in 1975 and ruled until 1996.

The other big winner was Amaiur, a left-wing Basque nationalist coalition, which entered parliament with seven seats, two more than the more moderate Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), which lost one seat. The Catalan Convergence and Union (CiU), the other main regional party, won 16 seats, six more than in 2008.

Like the terrorist group ETA, Amaiur wants independence for the Basque country. Amaiur was formed shortly before ETA announced an end to its more than 50-year conflict in which 829 people died, although the group has yet to lay down its arms. Among ETA's most spectacular attacks was

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TABLE 2 Results of the General Elections, 2011 and 2008 (seats, millions of votes and %)

	2011			2008		
	Seats	Votes	%	Seats	Votes	%
Popular Party	186	10.83	44.6	154	10.27	39.9
Socialists	110	6.97	28.7	169	11.28	43.8
Convergence and Union (Catalan)	16	1.01	4.1	10	0.77	3.0
United Left	11	1.68	6.9	2	0.96	3.8
Amaiur*	7	0.33	1.3	-	-	-
Progress and Democratic Union	5	1.14	4.7	1	0.30	1.2
Basque Nationalist Party	5	0.32	1.3	6	0.30	1.2
Catalan Republican Left	3	0.25	1.0	3	0.29	1.16
Galician National Bloc	2	0.18	0.7	2	0.21	0.83
CC-PNC (Canary Islands)	2	0.14	0.6	2	0.17	0.65
Compromis	1	0.12	0.5	-	-	-
FAC	1	0.09	0.4	-	-	-
Geroa Bai (Navarra)	1	0.04	0.2	1 (Na Bai)	0.06	0.24

* Basque leftist coalition in favour of independence for the Basque Country. Source: Interior Ministry.

TABLE 3 Socialist and PP Share of the Total Vote in General Elections, 1982-2011 (%)

	1982	1986	1989	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011
Socialists	48.1	44.1	39.6	38.8	37.6	34.2	42.6	43.8	28.7
Popular Party	26.4	25.9	25.8	34.8	38.8	44.5	37.6	39.9	44.6
Combined share	74.5	70.0	65.4	73.6	76.4	78.7	80.2	83.7	73.3

Source: Interior Ministry.

the assassination in 1973 of Franco's prime minister, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco

The best-ever results for the so-called *izquierda abertzale* in a general election underscored the depth of support for its cause without resorting to political violence.

Basque independence groups last won representation in Spain's national parliament in 1996, when Herri Batasuna (HB) won two seats in the assembly, although it did not take them up because the party refused to swear allegiance to the Spanish constitution. HB was subsequently banned.

The PP's electoral slogan "Join the change" (strikingly reminiscent of the Socialists' slogan in 1982, "For change") caught the mood of the electorate, while the Socialists' slogan "Fight for what you want" failed to convince enough voters that the PP was bent on dismantling the welfare system, as the Socialists claimed. Just as in 1982, voters wanted not just a change of government but also a deeper transformation of society.

The two main parties captured between them the lowest proportion of votes since 1993. Their combined share of the total vote was 73.3%, 10 points lower than in 2008 (see Table 3), while in terms of parliamentary representation the PP and the Socialists captured 84.6% of the seats between them,

down from 92.3% in 2008, the largest number in Spain's post-Franco democracy, and similar to that in 1996 (84.9%). The parliament in Madrid is the most fragmented since 1986, with 13 parties represented.

The reduced combined strength of the PP and the Socialists reflected, to some extent, the disenchantment with the political establishment, highlighted by the protests of the so-called *indignados* (the indignant ones), who burst unannounced on the political scene in May 2011. This loose movement brought together jobless youths, pensioners, students, anti-capitalists and electoral-reform campaigners. Opinion surveys showed that politicians were increasingly regarded as part of the problem and not part of the solution as they should be viewed.

The most noteworthy results for these two parties were in the region of Castilla-La Mancha, which the Socialists lost to the PP in the May 2011 regional elections after 28 years. In the general election, the Socialists suffered one of their largest regional defeats and the PP one of their biggest regional victories (with 56% of the votes) in Castilla-La Mancha. One of the main reasons for the Socialists' unprecedented defeat was the loss of support among those most ideologically close to it and among young voters. The first group tended to move leftwards, as

TABLE 4 The Left-Wing Share of the Vote in General Elections, 1977-2011 (%)

	1977	1982	1986	1989	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011
Socialists	29.4	48.1	44.1	39.6	39.1	37.6	34.2	42.6	43.8	28.7
Communist Party/United Left	9.3	4.0	3.9	8.0	9.5	10.5	5.5	5.0	3.8	6.9
Combined share	38.7	52.1	48.0	47.6	48.6	48.1	39.7	47.6	47.6	35.6

Source: Interior Ministry.

they were angry with the government's economic policies to tackle the crisis, and vote for the United Left (essentially the revamped communist party) or the centrist Progress and Democratic Union (its leader, Rosa Díez, is a former Socialist and was a minister in the Basque regional government during the 1990s) or abstain from voting.

One of the main reasons for the Socialists' unprecedented defeat was the loss of support among those most ideologically close to it and among young voters

Young voters (under the age of 24) and those between 30 and 44, who were aged between 19 and a little over 30 in the year 2000 when Zapatero became secretary general of the Socialists and entered political life with him, moved to the left and to the right of the Socialists. These are the two groups whose confidence the Socialists need to recover if they are to win the next general election, scheduled for 2015. According to the sociologist José Ignacio Wert, who is the Education, Culture and Sports Minister in the national government of the PP, around one million Socialist voters in 2008 voted for the PP in 2011 (about 15% of the votes the Socialists obtained in 2008). The PP has a stronger record in managing the economy.

The Socialists and United Left (the two leftist parties with votes spread around the country as opposed to Amaiur and the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), whose votes are concentrated in their respective regions) obtained 35.6% of total valid votes, the lowest proportion since the return to democracy after 1975 (see Table 4).

With youth unemployment (under the age of 24) at close to 50%, more than double that for the EU-27 and compared to an overall jobless rate of 23% in Spain, young Spanish adults have borne a large part of the brunt of the economic crisis. The Socialists'

programme for the 2008 general election contained a populist pledge to create two million jobs so as to secure full employment within four years. Far from achieving this, the number of unemployed more than doubled between 2008 and 2011 to more than 5 million.

The World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012* ranked the Spanish labour market the 119th most efficient out of a total of 140 countries. When the economy is growing quickly, Spain has a very strong job creation capacity – the country created 40% of new jobs in the euro zone in the 15 years up to 2007, many of them linked to the construction sector – but in a downturn it destroys jobs like no other country in the EU.

The three main reasons for job destruction, or, viewed another way, the failure to create jobs on a sustained basis, none of which were seriously tackled by Zapatero or his predecessor, José María Aznar, when he was the PP Prime Minister between 1996 and 2004, are an economic model excessively based on the labour-intensive construction sector, a labour market split between insiders (those with permanent jobs whose firing costs are relatively expensive by international standards) and outsiders (the very large number on temporary contracts) and an education system that has deteriorated and hampers the pressing need to move toward a more knowledge-based economy. Close to 30% of those aged between 18 and 24 left school at 16 with few or no qualifications, mainly lured during the economic boom by the ever-expanding construction sector. That sector has collapsed (in 2011 there were an estimated 750,000 unsold new homes) and many of those who lost their jobs are qualified for little else. Zapatero's decision not to run for a third term and for Rubalcaba (nine years older at 60), first Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, to be the Socialists' candidate did not have the desired effect. All opinion polls before the elections showed the PP winning by a big margin. The Socialists hoped, however, that their defeat would not be as massive as it was. Rubalcaba was the best-viewed minister in monthly surveys of politicians conducted by the government-run Cen-

TABLE 5

Evolution of Socialist and Popular Party Votes in the Andalusian elections, 1982-2012 (million)

	1982	1986	1990	1994	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012
Socialist	1.49	1.58	1.36	1.39	1.90	1.79	2.26	2.17	1.52
Popular Party*	0.48	0.74	0.61	1.23	1.46	1.53	1.42	1.73	1.56

* Popular Alliance (AP) between 1982 and 1986. Source: Government of Andalusia.

tre for Sociological Research (CIS), ahead of Zapatero and even of Rajoy, and hence was the party's best bet for limiting the extent of its electoral defeat. But he, too, was tainted by the economic crisis.

The Socialists paid a high price for overseeing an economy that carried on booming when they took office in 2004 from the PP, but which gradually sank into its worst recession in 50 years in 2009 as the government responded with measures belatedly.

This was the background against which the Socialists elected their new leader in February 2012. Rubalcaba competed against Carme Chacón, a 40-year-old female former Defence Minister, and scraped to victory by just 22 of the 955 votes cast at a primary election in Seville. Rubalcaba obtained 51.1% of the votes and Chacón 48.8%. His victory was as slim as that of Zapatero's at the party's congress in the year 2000 when he was elected secretary general with 41.7% of the votes compared to 40.8% won by José Bono. At that election, there were also two other candidates.

Both Rubalcaba and Chacón were clearly identified with the failures of the previous Socialist government. Chacón, in particular, sought to distance herself, backed by a group of prominent Socialists in a platform called *Mucho PSOE por hacer*, which recognised the party's errors and criticised the former government. Another group, called *Yo sí estuve allí*, made up of former senior members of the government, vindicated the government's achievements.

Rubalcaba represented the old guard of the party – he was an Education and then Presidency Minister in the third and fourth governments of Felipe Gonzalez – while the much younger and less experienced Chacón represented a fresher face. She was said to be the choice of Zapatero to lead the Socialists into the next general election in 2015. In simplistic terms, the choice at the primary election for the party's secretary general was between *Felipismo* and *Zapaterismo*, and, given the parlous state of the economy after eight years of Zapatero, it is not surprising that Socialist party delegates voted for what was regarded as the more experienced pair of hands, albeit by a tiny margin. Whether Rubalcaba will lead the Socialists into the 2015 election remains to be seen.

The PP received a surprising setback in March 2012 when it failed to dislodge the Socialists from Andalusia, the most populous of the 17 regions (8.4 million inhabitants), which the Socialists have governed since 1978 (see Table 5). The PP won 50 of the 109 seats (47 in 2008) in the regional parliament, five short of the absolute majority it needed. The Socialists won 47 seats (9 less) and the United Left 12 (double), making it possible for them to carry on ruling in a coalition government. The PP received 420,000 fewer votes in Andalusia than it did in the November 2011 general election, despite the many corruption scandals affecting the Socialists in that region, their internal divisions and the highest unemployment rate in Spain (31%). The left's victory showed that the government's reforms were beginning to meet resistance, while the large fall in voter turnout (from 72.6% in 2008 to 62.2%) suggested discontent with the whole political class. Rajoy's strategy of not announcing further reforms and austerity measures until after the elections in Andalusia, in order not to alienate voters, failed, while the Socialists' tactic of not having the elections in Andalusia at the same time as the general elections triumphed and animated the party.

The PP also received a blow in the regional elections in Asturias, where it did not win sufficient seats to oust the Foro of Francisco Álvarez Cascos, a dissident former PP minister, whom it looked as if it would have to support. The Socialists also did not obtain an absolute majority, although they won the most seats. The results of these two elections will make the central government's drastic spending cuts even more difficult to implement.

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