

COMMENTS TO THE 2015 ELECTION RESULTS

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The results of the 2015 general election in Spain have represented a significant change for the development and effects of the political process. Indeed, they have implied the reorganization of the traditional two-party system with respect to both the number and kinds of parties and the relation between voters and parties (voting behavior).

The Partido Popular (PP) remains the most voted party (28.7% of the votes), followed by the socialist party PSOE (22%) and, almost at the same level, Podemos (We can, 20.7%), who will have representation in Congress for the first time. Some steps behind, another new political party, Ciudadanos (Citizens, 13.9%) is the fourth political force. Izquierda Unida (United Left, 3.7%) has received a considerably lower support and is the fifth force in number of votes.

Regarding participation and abstention, the final figures are not yet available due to the fact that the votes of the Spanish residents living abroad have still not been counted, which means that results cannot be compared to those of the previous election yet. Since high levels of abstention are frequent amongst this group of voters, the final level will be 2-3 points above the 26.8% of the provisional results, that is, around 29%. This figure is thus closer to the results that are usually achieved in continuity scenarios: around 30% of abstention, while change scenarios count on 20-25% of abstention. Given the clear context for change and the high competitiveness arising from the uncertainty of the results, the reasons for such high abstention levels will need to be analyzed. The main hypotheses are the dissatisfaction with the political situation and mistrust of the political class, as well as the confusion before an increasing complexity of the political offer.

The relevant regression of the two big parties to date (PP and PSOE) and the strong appearance of new forces (Podemos and Ciudadanos) set the ground for a clear multi-party system. The scheme is completed by IU, relegated to second row, and several regional parties.

This scenario cannot be considered as stable in terms of parties or voters' preferences. Changes in the system started in 2011 with the decline of the then governing party, PSOE, in the general elections due to austerity measures that undermined the party's personality. This situation created a vacuum, a disoriented electorate which mostly opted for abstention. The Socialists were not able to find the way to redefine their personality and build an alternative from the opposition – this led to a new setback in 2015, also touched by several cases of corruption. The loss of votes also experienced by the PP some days ago is the consequence of the erosion of the image and support the party had enjoyed months before due to unpopular policies adopted in the fields of social welfare, economics and freedom, together with many relevant cases of corruption.

The wave of citizen mistrust of the leading parties also affects the Judiciary, the autonomous system and the monarchy (especially some of its acts). According to several public opinion studies, Spain is suffering from a general crisis of confidence in the representative and institutional system.

Podemos and Ciudadanos emerge in this context in order to find a solution to it. Although presenting absolutely different strategies and orientations, these two parties share the willingness to change the situation. They have introduced new strategies to regenerate politics and new faces to implement them. They have obtained 34.6% of the votes in front of the 50.7% of the two big traditional parties, who still resist as the main political forces in 34 of the 50 provincial constituencies.

Both public opinion surveys and the results of the different kinds of elections carried out since 2011 have proved the existence of a high level of electoral volatility. The growing number of citizens who are not strongly attached to one specific political party is one of the consequences of the social, economic and political situation. This fact enables behavioral change (in favor of another party or of abstention) from one political election to another based on short-term factors. However, electoral volatility must not be confused with disorientation. Indeed, it is a new type of response to a specific situation, more complex, fluid and dynamic than those given until now.