

# Podemos could lose half its seats in Spain's general election

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Support for Spain's pseudo-left Podemos party has slumped ahead of the April 28 general election as a result of its pro-austerity, pro-Socialist Party (PSOE) policies.

Polls suggest the share of the vote for the Podemos-United Left coalition has crashed from 21.1 percent at the last election to 12.3 percent, and that it could lose up to half of its 71 seats in Congress.

Some of its support has gone to the PSOE, which is polling just over 27 percent, up from 22.7 percent at the last election in 2016. The Popular Party (PP) is polling 19 percent, down from 33 percent.

The fascist Vox party could enter Congress for the first time with 10 percent of the seats—mostly at the expense of the PP and the right-wing anti-separatist party Citizens, now at 17.7 percent. It is possible a right-wing coalition government involving the PP, Citizens and Vox could come to power.

A major reason for the drop in electoral support for Podemos is mass abstention, particularly among the youth who no longer identify the party as a radical alternative. According to polls, only 49.5 percent of the population below 25 will vote on April 28.

Podemos emerged as the decades-long two-party set-up, involving the PP and PSOE, crumbled following the 2008 global economic crash and was further discredited during years of austerity. Guided by Stalinist-influenced academics and theoretically rooted in a postmodernist rejection of Marxism and the revolutionary role of the working class, Podemos articulated the interests of affluent layers of the middle class.

It sought to divert opposition to the social counter-revolution against the working class behind criticisms of the cronyism and corruption of the PP/PSOE “caste,” claims of opposing austerity and talk of nationalising the top companies and banks.

Within a year of its creation in 2014, Podemos was challenging the PSOE and PP as Spain's most supported

party (polling more than 25 percent of the vote). However, the working class has now witnessed first-hand how Podemos rules in the local “Cities of Change”—with the imposition of austerity, and cuts estimated at €2.3 billion, strike breaking and attacks on migrants. One of the party's main promises—to stop the rapid increase in rents (Barcelona by 48 percent between 2013 and 2017, and in Madrid by 30 percent)—has not materialised.

Since its creation, Podemos has functioned as an adjunct to the PSOE. It helped to bring to power a PSOE government in June 2018 under a supposedly “left” Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

During its eight months in power, the PSOE proved indistinguishable from the former PP government, implementing austerity measures, showering the military with billions of euros, supporting the US-led regime-change operations in Venezuela, intensifying the crackdown on migrants and continuing the repression of the Catalan nationalists.

Podemos would still be supporting that administration had it not been for the Catalan nationalists withdrawing their support for the 2019 budget, forcing Sánchez in February to call a snap election.

Internally, Podemos is imploding, riven with factional disputes, desertions and a collapse in membership. Last December, the party, which claims 507,250 members, re-elected Pablo Iglesias as general secretary with just 60,000 people voting. This was less than a third of the turnout in the last referendum on Iglesias's leadership a few months earlier in which 190,000 voted.

The Stalinist-led United Left (IU) and regional nationalist parties that rushed to ally with Podemos when it was riding high are abandoning it. The IU, while continuing to ally itself with Podemos at the national level in Unidos Podemos (renamed in the grammatically feminine form, Unidas Podemos, in time for the election), has decided it will not stand with Podemos in local and

regional elections on May 26.

IU congressional deputy Manuel Monereo, a Stalinist and very close to Iglesias, announced that the Podemos project was “finished” and called for something new to be created to give the necessary “hope and freshness.”

In Galicia, the “left nationalist” En Marea alliance has rejected Podemos participation with one of its deputies declaring, “I’m outraged that we have the largest representation in the history of Galicia but we are losing influence.” En Marea is expected to go from five seats in the last election to three seats.

The Valencian nationalists of Compromís announced that it will not repeat its alliance with Podemos. Compromís leader Mónica Oltra said, “It is not intelligent to repeat the same formula that diminishes our electoral possibilities.” Compromís is expected to lose three of its four seats.

The past months have also seen desertions of top Podemos leaders. Iñigo Errejón, long-time number-two of Podemos, has created a new party with Madrid Mayor Manuela Carmena, More Madrid (Más Madrid), with the explicit aim of forging alliances with right-wing parties. The general secretary of the Podemos Madrid region and founding member, Ramón Espinar, has resigned, saying, “When you have no room to lead and do not share the course, you have to go.”

Last week, Podemos Congress deputy Pablo Bustinduy, who served as party spokesman in the Congressional Commission of Foreign Affairs, quit as a candidate for Unidas Podemos in the May European Union (EU) elections.

At a March 23 rally, Iglesias, returning to political activity after a three-month paternity leave, confessed, “I know I have disappointed many people. ... We have brought shame on ourselves with our infighting for seats, positions [in the state machine] and visibility. We have acted like any other party.”

“We have not been able to change the rules of the enemy’s game. We have supported measures that could alleviate problems but they do not solve them. We have not come to apply patches.”

Iglesias’s appeal that Podemos stop applying “patches” does not signal a genuine change of course. Podemos will continue to play the “enemy’s game.” He wants Podemos to take ministerial positions in a PSOE-led government, rather than propping it up from the outside, claiming that this will enable him to exert pressure more directly and somehow turn the PSOE to the left.

Podemos spokesperson Irene Montero insisted that

Iglesias was “the only candidate” that defended the working class and the only one “who can sit in front of those in power and say to them that their privileges have ended.” Claiming that without Podemos the PSOE would “never have looked to its left,” Montero said that “we have never been closer to installing Pablo Iglesias in the Council of Ministers” and that, if they receive enough votes, they will attempt to renegotiate a government with the PSOE.

In less than 24 hours, the PSOE, which is trying to outdo the right-wing parties in a law-and-order campaign directed against the Catalan nationalists, replied to Podemos. PSOE Organisation Secretary José Luis Ábalos made clear the party was seeking an alliance with Citizens, which “was preferable to the [Catalan] separatists to bring Sánchez to power.” Citizens’ support is “always preferable to those who question the unity of Spain and the constitutional framework.”

While the PSOE is preparing a right-wing government with Citizens that openly advocates for austerity and police state rule in Catalonia, Podemos is claiming that only it can push the PSOE to the left.

The great unmentionable in these elections is the growing levels of poverty, precariousness and the preparations for further austerity and police state measures to respond to the international upsurge in the working class.

The Bank of Spain has already alerted that the next government will have to implement €25 billion in cuts to satisfy Spain’s commitments to the EU, slash the public deficit from an estimated 2.5 percent now to 1.3 percent at year-end and 0.5 percent in 2020. At the same time, economic growth is expected to slow from 2.2 percent to 1.7 percent in 2021.

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