



Dear RAMON,

Can you tell us about the forthcoming elections in Spain?



Will these elections mark the end of the two-party system?

The two-party system has ensured the governability of the country since the transition to democracy four decades ago, but next Sunday the 350 seats in the Parliament will be distributed among four different parties. The two newcomers, Ciudadanos and Podemos, are finally credited with 19% and 16% of the votes respectively. This is less than what was expected at some point over the last two or three years. Both have found a favourable context for their development in the large urban constituencies – Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia or Seville – while in the rural provinces, voters remain more loyal to the PP (the centre-right Partido Popular) and the PSOE (the Spanish socialist party). It would therefore be wrong to claim that bipartisanship will disappear, as the parties with the capacity of forming and leading a future government are the same ones as before. This being said, no one will miss bipartisanship: it has never been perfect.

What is the perspective for the current government?

All surveys confirm that the PP will win the elections, despite its massive losses. Estimations are that 2 million people who voted for the PP in the last elections will vote for Ciudadanos this time. Their reasons are the non-fulfilment of some promises – especially in areas of fiscal policy – and the media impact of the various cases of corruption uncovered in recent years. Still, the PP continues to be the frontrunner in voter intention with almost an eight-point advantage over its immediate follower. To a large degree, it capitalises on the fact that it has managed to invert the catastrophic economic situation the country was in when it came to power in 2011.

What role will Ciudadanos and Podemos play after the elections?

The PP will have to seek support from another political party to form a government. Ciudadanos seems the most reasonable choice, although its leader, Albert Rivera, continues to be hesitant to support the PP. Ciudadanos will have to decide whether to make a pact with the PP or with the PSOE and thus holds the key to the future government of Spain. It is unlikely that Podemos will enter any government coalition, even though in recent months it has followed a de-radicalization strategy that has caused more than one problem in its ranks and the disenchantment of an important part of its initial social base. The rise of Ciudadanos will also have a consequence on the Catalan independence process. It is important to remember that Ciudadanos was created ten years ago in Catalonia with the purpose of challenging the pressure of Catalan nationalism with a decidedly unitary position. Therefore, the presence of Ciudadanos' in the next Spanish government would put the brakes on the independence ambitions in Catalonia.

Three days before the elections how many voters are yet undecided?

All scenarios can vary considerably if we take into account that 41% of the voter census has not decided on its vote yet! This percentage is ten points higher than what was registered in the two previous elections, and it means that the final results can still tell all the surveys wrong. What's even more relevant is that only 9% of the undecided are split between PP or PSOE. This means that the two emerging parties could benefit the most by the unfolding of the electoral campaign. However, this advantage could be compensated by the impact of the last televised debate of 14 December between the PP and PSOE candidates. By being perceived as a second round where the rest of the parties are removed from the battle for the final victory, it might have reoriented the final voter intentions toward these two classic parties of bipartisanship. All of this remains to be seen, and more than on any other previous occasion, we'll have to wait for the dust to settle on election day.

All the best Ramon.

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