



Dear José,

What about the general elections next Sunday in Spain ? What can we expect ?



Next Sunday Spain will hold its 12th general elections since the Establishment of the Democracy after the end of the Franco regime. It will be the most open elections in more than thirty years. The traditional two dominant parties, the Partido Popular (PP, centre-right) and the Socialists (PSOE, centre-left) are challenged by two new political groups: the far left Podemos (literally “we can”) and Ciudadanos (literally “Citizens”, from the centre). While historically PP and PSOE used to attract together around 75% of the votes, the polls are now giving them a potential of around 50%. In this final week, the PP is ahead in the polls, with 27% of the vote, while each of the other three parties struggles to become the second political force of the country with a share of around 20% each.

One of the side-effects of the increased competition is that parties have worked much more on their programmes than they used to do, and they are under the surveillance of “watchdogs” and think tanks carrying out in-depth evaluations. But the real novelty of these elections is the high media exposure of the main candidates. They are not only taking part in political debates, but also in TV entertainment shows at prime time, doing things like driving rally cars, climbing in balloons, dancing, cooking or playing guitar. What presses them to behave in this way is the wish to appear as “someone from main street” rather than as well-established members of the Spanish economic and social elite.

Despite the new competition, demographics still play for the traditional parties’ advantage.

The Popular Party, which lacks popularity in the younger generations, is the clear winner among the elderly, who represent a high percentage of the voting census. The new parties have very good expectations among urban, young and middle-aged people voters, but they are – for the moment at least – unable to gain the confidence of the older and rural population, where the traditional parties continue to have a strong support.

The final result of these elections is charged with a high degree of uncertainty. None of the main competitors will achieve a sufficient majority. This means coalition-building, which is not a usual exercise in Spanish democracy. The most likely coalition would be a centre/centre-right government, with the PP seeking support from Ciudadanos. But even this probability is low: Ciudadanos has attracted many traditional voters from the PP camp, and they cannot at the same time aim at replacing the old party and support it in a coalition. The probability of an alternative coalition – with PSOE as the senior party – seems almost impossible. As a result, the most likely scenario is a very short legislative term ending with anticipated elections as early as in 2017.

It is difficult to forecast what would be the reaction of the voters in such a case. The experience from the regional elections in May 2015 show that Ciudadanos suffered a strong decline just after the elections, when many of their voters realised that dividing the centre-right vote opened the doors to left-wing coalitions in six regions, which were formerly ruled by the Popular Party. If the new parties do not appear as real alternatives, they could lose their newly gained support in a new electoral run. But the truth is that nobody knows what is going to happen: everything is open, uncertainty reigns.

All the best,

José

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