

The End of the Two-Party System in Spain?

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On 26 June 2016, general elections to the Congress of Deputies and the Senate were held in Spain, the second in six months after elections on 20 December 2015 failed to produce the parliamentary majority needed to form a government. Once the deadline provided for in the Constitution had expired, the country's citizens were once again called to the polls.

However, the results on 26 June were no different to those in December, other than a fall in turnout by more than three points, one of the lowest since 1977 (73.2% in 2015 and 69.8% in 2016). The people, it would seem, are tiring of corruption, the economic and political situation caused by the crisis and political parties' inability to find solutions to unemployment and growing levels of inequality and financial insecurity.

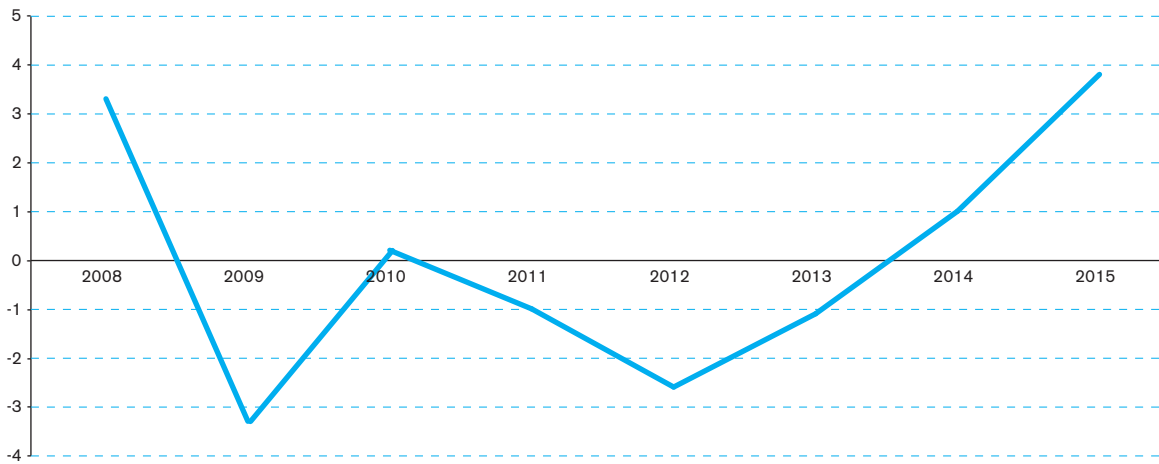
The labour reform and social and budget cutbacks led to the recovery of economic growth after five years of negative growth in GDP (2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013) or near-zero growth (2010) and, in 2014 and 2015, positive growth, Spain showing more growth in 2015 than any other eurozone country.¹ Parallel to this, the unemployment rate was falling, although in 2015 it still stood at 20.9% of the active population (4,779,500 unemployed). However, the economic growth and decrease in unemployment were not enough to offset the negative consequences of the crisis in the more vulnerable sectors of society. In fact, the decline in employment figures went on unabated after the third quarter of 2007, when it

reached a total of 20,753,400 people. The lowest point was registered in the first quarter of 2014 at 16,950,600, representing an 18.3% decline. The upturn in late 2014 and 2015 set the total for the end of 2015 at 18,094,200 employed, still 12.8% below the figures prior to the crisis.

Overall, the 2015 and 2016 elections came at a time when the economy was not in decline and unemployment not rising, but the effect of seven years of crisis had taken its toll on the population: high rates of unemployment and part-time employment, job insecurity and low wages. The economic revival that began in 2014 was not strong enough to improve living conditions, and average incomes per household continued to fall, reaching €26,092 in 2015 as compared with €28,787 in 2008 and €30,045 in 2009 and representing a drop of between 9.4 and 13.2% in the purchasing power of Spanish households. Meanwhile, the at-risk-of-poverty rate reached its peak in 2014 at 29.2% and remained at around 29% in 2015, while in 2008 it stood at 23.8%. In addition, the effects of the crisis have been clearly gender-specific: female unemployment was on average 0.73 points higher than male unemployment between 2008 and 2015, reaching its highest difference (1.62 points) after the recovery was underway in 2015. The risk of poverty, on the other hand, was tilted towards women until 2011, the relation reversing as of 2013.

Consequently, the election results of 2015 and 2016 must be interpreted in a depressive and uncertain economic and social context, which explains why there was such little difference between both elections.

¹ National Statistics Institute (INE) and Eurostat: <http://www.ine.es/>; <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.



Source: INE.

As can be seen, only the PP and ERC won more votes in 2016 than in 2015 (9.3% and 4.6% respectively), while the other political parties lost votes. The conservative PP benefited from 'tactical voting' by C's supporters, while the republican party won the 'tactical votes' of supporters of a CDC in the process of being refounded. The variations in the number of seats owe more to the redistributive effect of the d'Hondt law, which favours the parties with most votes, especially in constituencies with fewer seats, over major changes in voting.² Lastly, it is worth noting C's decline, which lost 390,749 votes; the drop in PSOE seats, which had its worst results since 1977; and the UP's loss of 1,089,760 votes, compared with 2015, when Podemos and the successors to the historic Communist Party of Spain (under the initials IU as of 1986) were not in coalition. Finally, the other parties repeated their results, with downward fluctuations for CDC, PNV and Bildu.

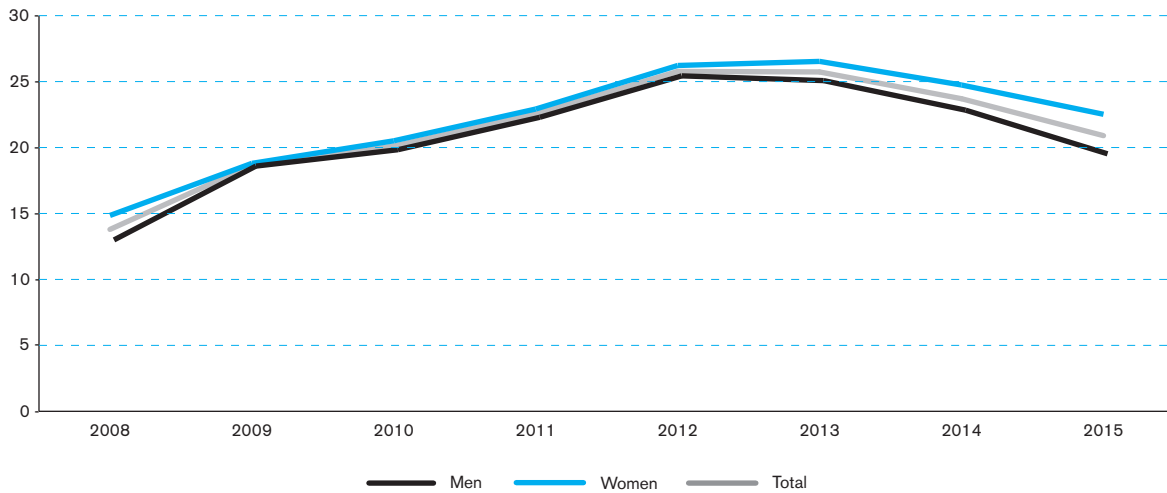
The results in 2016 revealed other factors that should be taken into account.

On the one hand, the difference in electoral behaviour between Catalonia and the Basque Country is worth noting. While in the other communities the most voted party was the PP and the second the PSOE (except in Madrid, Navarra, Valencia and the Balearics, where UP came second), in the

Basque Country and Catalonia, UP won, with EAJ-PNV and the ERC respectively in second place. This is not a new phenomenon; ever since the country's first elections (1977), these two nations have always presented a different political system, with more electoral options and a prominence of nationalist and socialist parties. In Catalonia, victory had always gone to the Socialists' Party of Catalonia (PSC, the Catalan version of the PSOE) until 2011 when Convergence and Union (CiU, electoral coalition formed by CDC and the Democratic Union of Catalonia – UDC) won, and 2015 and 2016 when En Común Podemos won. Second place always went to CiU, except in 1979, 2015 and 2016. The most significant results, undoubtedly, are those of the PP, which at best was the third strongest political party and often came fourth, fifth or even sixth. The situation is similar in the Basque Country where the PNV and PSOE had always alternated as the most voted parties until 2015. Between 1979 and 2004 and in 2011 the PNV won, with the PSOE in second place (except in 2000 when they were beaten by the PP), while in 1977 and 2008 the PSOE was the most voted party, forcing the PNV into second place. In 2011, victory went to the PNV and second place to AMAIUR (an electoral version of the left-wing Basque nationalist). In 2015 and 2016, however, UP won with

² The number of votes that each political party needed in 2016 to gain a seat was: EAJ-PNV, 57,243 (2015, 50,386); PP, 57,709 votes (58,837); CDC, 60,230 (70,907); PSOE, 63,820 (61,615); ERC, 69,922 (66,865); UP, 71,123 (in 2015 Podemos 75,547 and IU 463,392); CC, 78,080 (81,917); EH-Bildu, 92,046 (109,563); C's, 97,618 (87,863). Reworking of electoral data.

CHART 7 Unemployment Rate, 4th Quarter (%)



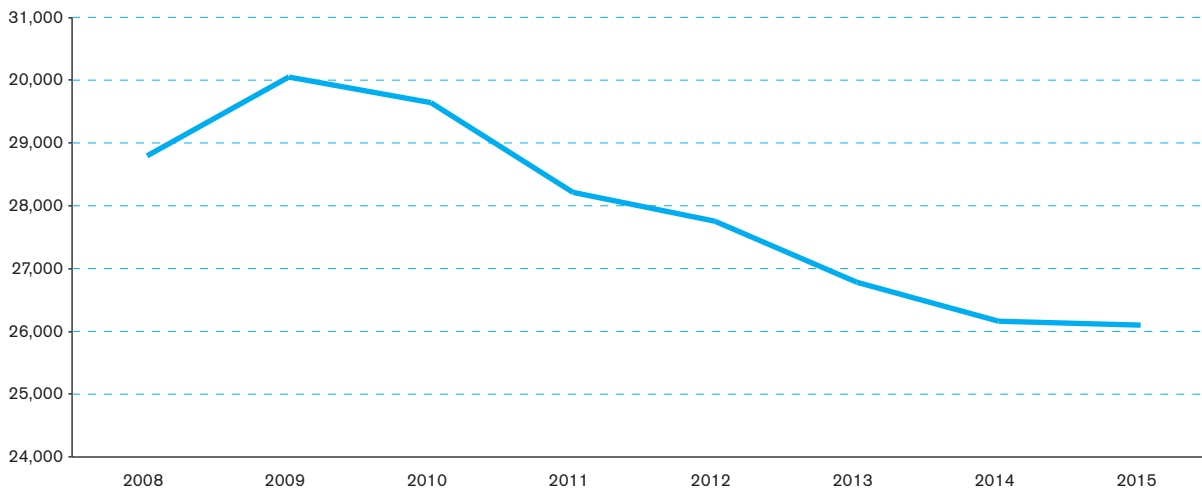
Source: INE.

the PNV in second place. Again the conservative party has been incapable since 1977 of rising from third place (except in 2000) and, on occasion, has been relegated to fourth or fifth position.

On the other hand, the results in 2015 and 2016 indicate a clear decline in the two-party system, which characterized the Spanish political system from 1977 onwards. Between 1977 and 2015, the two most voted parties always won more than 65% of the votes between them (63.8% in 1977), and often won more than 70% or 80% of total votes. However, in 2015 and 2016, the rise of Podemos and C's reduced this percentage to little more than 50%. Podemos rose as a political party from the assemblies of the 'indig-

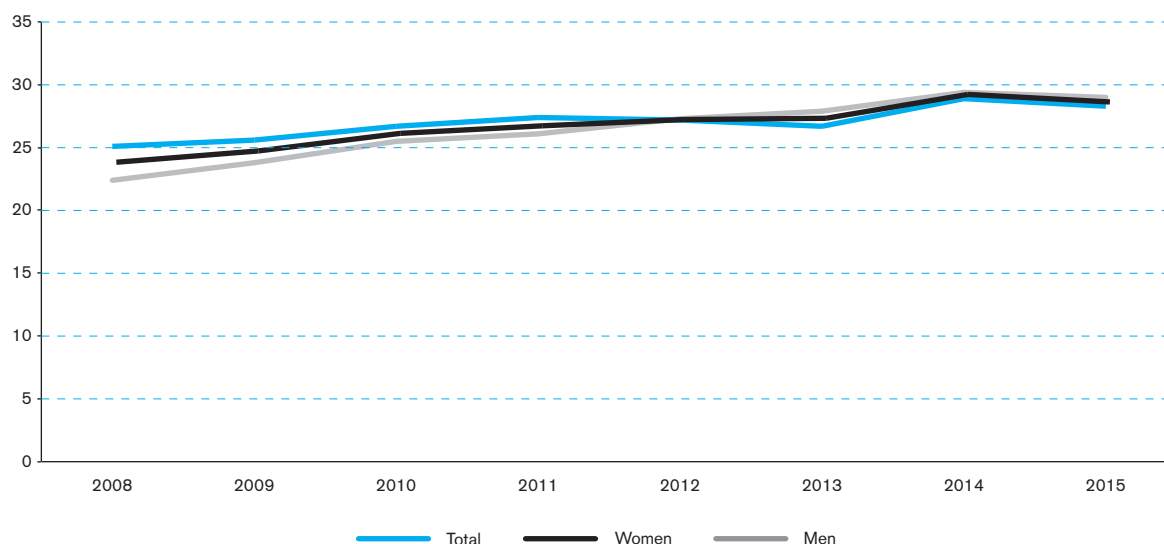
nants' on 15 May (15M) 2011, who were protesting against the social consequences of the economic crisis (unemployment, job insecurity, evictions, poverty, etc.) and against the austerity policies imposed by Brussels. It was intended as an alternative to the PSOE and to dispute the hegemony of the leftist bloc. C's, which had already been present in the Catalan Parliament since 2006 and had grown through its anti-Catalan discourse, represents a centre-right option which, in contrast to the immobility of the PP, is intended to regenerate political life, reform and streamline the administration of the State and put an end to corruption. In short, both parties were able to break up the two-party system, making it crucial, at

CHART 8 Average Income per Household (€)



Source: INE.

CHART 9 At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate (%)



Source: INE.

TABLE 5 Election Results 2015-2016

Political Party*	Congress of Deputies					
	Results 20 December 2015			Results 26 June 2016		
	Votes	Votes	Seats	Votes	Votes	Seats
PP	7,236,965	28.71	123	7,906,185	33.03	137
PSOE	5,545,315	22.00	90	5,424,709	22.66	85
UP (Podemos + IU)	-	-	-	5,049,734	20.90	71
Podemos ¹	5,212,711	20.68	69	-	-	-
IU ²	926,783	3.68	2	-	-	-
C's	3,514,528	13.94	40	3,123,769	13.05	32
ERC ³	601,782	2.39	9	629,294	2.63	9
CDC ⁴	567,253	2.25	8	481,839	2.01	8
EAJ-PNV ⁵	302,316	1.20	6	286,215	1.20	5
EH-Bildu ⁶	219,125	0.87	2	184,092	0.77	2
CC ⁷	81,917	0.32	1	78,080	0.33	1
TOTAL DEPUTIES			350			350

* Parties or electoral coalitions that obtained parliamentary representation. ¹ They ran under different names depending on the social movements that led the candidacy in each territory. In Catalonia, En Comú Podemos; in Valencia, Podemos-Compromiso; in Galicia, Podemos-En Marea. In each of these cases the coalition already included IU in 2015. ² In 2015 they participated under the name United Left, Popular Unity in Common (IU-UPeC). ³ Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC). ⁴ Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC). In 2015, they adopted the name Democracy and Freedom (DL). ⁵ Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea-Basque Nationalist Party. ⁶ Euskal Herria Bildu. Left-wing Basque nationalist. ⁷ Canarian Coalition.

Source: Spanish Government. Interior Ministry: <http://resultados2016.infoelecciones.es/99CO/DCO99999TO.htm?lang=es>

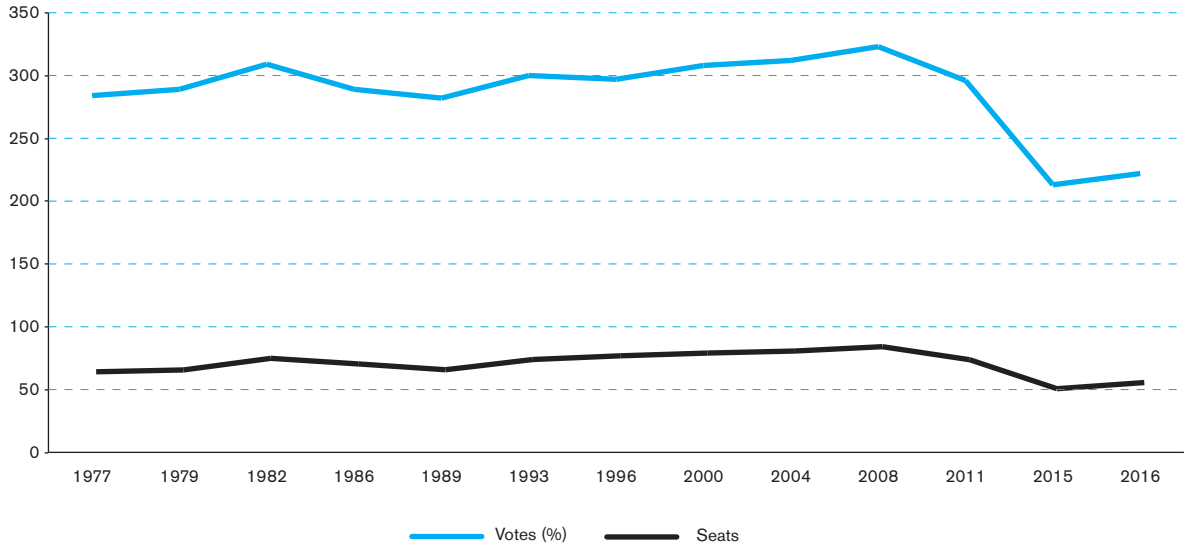
least in the immediate future, for agreements to be reached to win a government majority.

Lastly, a new factor has appeared in the Spanish political panorama that demonstrates the failure of the State of the Autonomies in Catalonia.³ In 2006, a new Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia was approved in a referendum, pushed forward by the government of the Generalitat and supported by the Catalan Parliament. However, in view of the PSOE's

passive response, the PP began a campaign against the new Statute – which included collecting signatures throughout the State – and brought a constitutional challenge before the Constitutional Court (TC). On 28 June 2010, the court ruled that the references of the Statute's preamble to “Catalonia as a nation” and “the national reality of Catalonia” had no legal effect and totally or partially annulled 14 articles and reinterpreted 24 articles and three addi-

³ Antoni SEGURA, «Un balance del Estado de las Autonomías en España (1976-2002)» en Rafael QUIROSA-CHEYROUZE Y MUÑOZ (Coord.), *Historia de la Transición en España. Los inicios del proceso democratizador*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2007: 331-352 and *Crònica del catalanisme. De l'autonomia a la independència*, Barcelona, Angle, 2013.

CHART 10 The Two Most Voted Parties, 1977-2016



Source: reworking of electoral data.

tional provisions. It was the beginning of a broad movement in Catalonia in support of its right to decide (the right to self-determination) that produced sensitive changes in the Catalan political system. In the elections to the Parliament of Catalonia of 27 September 2015, the pro-independence parties won an absolute majority in the Parliament for the first time with 72 seats (out of 135) although with an insufficient voting majority (48% of the votes). In any case, the parties in favour of holding a referendum on the future of Catalonia (including the Catalan version of Podemos and part of the socialist electorate) won more than 60% of the votes and the government of the Generalitat began preparing a road-map towards achieving independence.

In conclusion, the results of the 2015 and 2016 Spanish elections indicate a decline in the two-party system; the need for a comprehensive regeneration of the political sphere, putting an end to corruption, illegal party-funding, the mismanagement of public funds and influence peddling; a need to streamline and modernize the administration of the State and public institutions; a need to revise policies to address the economic crisis, which have, so far, led to a weakening of the welfare State, increased job insecurity, great social inequality and a rise in the number of people at risk of poverty; and, finally, an urgency in addressing a major issue pending from the political transition, the management of state territory.