

# Spain: PSOE scrapes home in Andalusia - has it stopped the rise of Podemos?

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This is super election-year in Spain. In May, there are local elections across the country and in the coming months there are elections for several regional governments. Andalusia, whose regional parliament was elected on 22 March, stands at the beginning of this long series of elections and political battles in Spain. The super election-year will then come to an end in the autumn with elections for the national government. The election in Andalusia, the most populous region in Spain, can be seen as an important test of opinion in a country which has been hard-hit by the EU crisis.

Particularly after the electoral victory of Syriza in Greece, one party in particular is in the spotlight for the European left, Podemos. The share of the vote for this party in the regional election in Andalusia was awaited with great expectation. In the most recent national opinion polls, the party proved to be the most popular with electors with 27 percent. This historically high result for the still very new party could not, however, be reproduced in Andalusia.

The election was won, as expected, by the Spanish Socialist Workers Party, PSOE, which took 47 of the 109 seats with 35.4 percent of the vote. Nonetheless, as the governing party in Andalusia, it showed clear losses, this was its worst result in its stronghold since the end of the Franco era. However, the Popular Party, the governing party at the national level, suffered an even bigger defeat as the electors punished it for its austerity policies. The party gained just 33 seats with 26.8 percent of the vote, losing about one third of its seats.

By contrast, Podemos was able for the first time in its short history to enter one of Spain's regional parliaments, winning 15 seats. Nonetheless, its share of the vote, 14.8 percent, stands in sharp contrast to the opinion polls noted above. Here it has to be pointed out that they had to fight hard against the centre-right populist party 'Citizens' (Ciudadanos). This party, also contesting in Andalusia for the first time, was able to win nine seats with 9.3 percent of the vote. If one adds the Podemos and Citizens results together that gives 25 percent, virtually the figure for Podemos in the opinion polls. So why was Podemos unable to match the opinion poll results in this election?

Citizens, is a populist party founded in Catalonia in opposition to the independence movement but now active nationally. It has experienced a similar rise in popularity to Podemos in recent months. On the one hand, this shows that the long standing two-party system in Spain has outlived itself. On the other hand, it also shows clearly that with its populist approach to politics, Podemos can easily come under pressure from the right.

We have presented our characterisation of Podemos as a populist party elsewhere, here we will only point

out that its leadership around Pablo Iglesias has oriented itself strongly towards the tradition of Chavez and his populism. Instead of a democratic centralist organisation with a clear orientation to the working class, Podemos was built with a focus on the personality of its leader and his legitimisation through mass election. As can now be clearly seen, this is a concept that can easily be taken over by another party. This has led in the end to strong competition against which Podemos cannot give clear independent class politics. Its whole strategic orientation can now be seen as a shot in its own foot.

The anticapitalist and Trotskyist forces, both inside Podemos and outside it, should recognise the need to take up the fight against the Podemos leadership. The "Anticapitalist Left" (Spanish section of the Fourth International) has played a particularly unworthy role in this respect. It dissolved itself without any open struggle against the Iglesias leadership and its strategic and tactical orientation for Podemos.

In the context of the super election-year, this can clearly be seen as a major error. The election results in Andalusia could have been used by a revolutionary platform inside Podemos as a basis for explaining to the rank and file members the weaknesses of Iglesias' populism and its programme. This would have provided a basis for explaining the need for a revolutionary action programme and winning members to anticapitalist revolutionary politics.

A revolutionary opposition in Podemos, however, would not only have the experience of Spain's super election-year to draw on to take forward the building of a revolutionary workers' party. The electoral success of Syriza, and its rapid capitulation in the struggle against the dictates of the European Union, would also be important international evidence to convince the Spanish working class that the struggle against the crisis needs the building of a revolutionary workers' party at the international level. The neo-reformist populism of an Iglesias or Tsipras leadership offers no solutions.

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