



Rajoy Likely to Benefit From Spain's Continued Political Deadlock

Maria Savel | Thursday, June 30, 2016

Spain held its second general election in six months on Sunday, after political leaders failed to form a governing coalition in the wake of December's inconclusive vote. However, results from Sunday's voting didn't move the needle much from December, and Spain, once again, faces the prospect of continued political deadlock.



Spain's acting prime minister and Popular Party leader Mariano Rajoy during a campaign rally, Madrid, June 24, 2016 (AP photo by Daniel Ochoa de Olza).

Acting Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's Popular Party (PP) managed a better showing this time around, winning 33 percent of the vote (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/26/spanish-elections-exit-polls-show-deadlock-likely-to-continue>), up from 29 percent in December. This gives the party 137 seats in the Spanish parliament, but leaves it short of the 176 seats needed for a majority, so Rajoy must now find coalition partners.

The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) came in second with 22.7 percent of the vote and 85 seats, followed by the Unidos Podemos coalition—comprising Podemos and an alliance of far-left and communist parties known as Izquierda Unida—with 21 percent and 71 seats, and the center-right Ciudadanos with 13 percent and 32 seats. In the December vote, the PSOE won 22 percent of the vote, Podemos 21 percent and Ciudadanos 14 percent.

Rajoy is certainly in a better position to form a government than he was in December, but, as Antonio Barroso, a political analyst, told the AP (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/spain-conservatives-win-vote-but-face-problems-to-form-govt/2016/06/27/402f853e-3c3a-11e6-9e16-4cf01a41decb_story.html), “It is unlikely that other parties will rapidly give him their support.” Already the PSOE and Ciudadanos rejected Rajoy's proposal (/articles/19194/spains-socialists-reject-rajoys-attempt-at-grand-coalition) of a “grand coalition” of moderate parties.

One of the biggest surprises of Sunday's vote was the third-place performance of the Unidos Podemos coalition. Polls leading up to and even on the day of the election were predicting a strong, second-place showing that would potentially put Unidos Podemos in the position to form a left-leaning governing coalition. “These are not good results,” said Inigo Errejón, the deputy head of Podemos, shortly after the

results were announced.

There are several explanations for Unidos Podemos' underwhelming performance at the polls. Many Spaniards did not like party leader Pablo Iglesias' tactics ([/trend-lines/18738/will-spain-s-new-election-bring-political-stability-or-just-uncertainty](#)) during negotiations following December's elections, including his refusal to join a coalition with Ciudadanos. Many saw him as playing a political game, hoping that new elections would be called so Podemos could fare better the second time around. If that was the case, the latest results revealed it to be a losing gamble.

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Many within Podemos, including Errejon, were against forming an electoral coalition with Izquierda Unida, believing such a partnership went against Podemos' initial anti-establishment mission. According Sebastian Royo, a professor at Suffolk University, “many people liked Podemos because they weren't part of the establishment,” and they lost support because many Spaniards “didn't want to vote for the communists.”

Meanwhile, the PSOE is breathing a sigh of relief “that they remain the principal party of the left,” says Royo. This, in part, explains the party's quick rejection of a coalition with the PP. If they were to join the PP, that would leave the political left-wing wide open, allowing Podemos, or another party, to take up the banner of the leftist opposition.

With a grand coalition having been ruled out, the most likely government will be a minority coalition between the PP and Ciudadanos. This is an appealing solution for the PP, as it will give it some level of political cover. The party was criticized after the December vote for trying to go it alone and not doing enough to form a viable governing coalition.

Ciudadanos party leader Albert Rivera said he is ready to start talks (<http://www.euronews.com/2016/06/27/spain-s-conservatives-win-general-election>) with Rajoy and the PP on forming a government, even though Ciudadanos does not want to see Rajoy stay on as prime minister. The PP has faced numerous corruption scandals (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/22/spanish-minister-accused-of-conspiring-against-political-rivals>) in recent months, and while Rajoy has not been implicated in them, he is seen by Ciudadanos, and many in Spain, as the head of a corrupt party. However, given that the PP polled stronger this time around and Ciudadanos lost votes compared to December, Ciudadanos is not in a strong negotiating position. Any demands for Rajoy to step down will likely fall on deaf ears.

Another issue facing a potential PP-Ciudadanos coalition is that between the two parties, they only have 169 seats in parliament, seven short of a majority. There is also the possibility of Rajoy and the PP picking up the support of small regional parties from the Canary Islands and the Basque country, which would give the coalition a total of 175 seats in parliament. In either case, Rajoy will need to win the tacit support of the PSOE, which has long opposed a PP-led government.

Spain's king will consult party leaders after the new parliament session opens on July 19 and nominate one to try and form a government. As the leader of the party that won the most votes, Rajoy will likely be given the first opportunity to form a government, which will then face a vote of confidence. In the first round of voting, Rajoy would need a majority of votes to become prime minister. If that fails to happen, and it most certainly will, there will be a second round of voting that only requires he receive more votes in favor than against.

According to Royo, the probable outcome is that "in exchange for some concessions, the Socialists will abstain from the [second] vote and allow the PP to form a government." If Rajoy does remain prime minister under such circumstances, he will head a minority government with limited room for maneuver, given the PSOE's de facto parliamentary veto over any legislation.

But however difficult governing turns out to be, it is likely that the process of electing the next prime minister will go quickly once the newly elected parliament is in session. There is nothing to be gained from waiting, since Spaniards are already extremely frustrated by the political deadlock that has now lasted over six months, says Royo. "It is hard to see anyone dragging this out."

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