

Spain's new coalition must face up to the Catalan crisis and the rise of the far right

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We must address the crisis facing our political system, not least the worrying surge in support for the Vox party

• Pablo Iglesias is the secretary-general of Podemos, in coalition with the Spanish Socialist Workers' party

The preliminary agreement for a [coalition government](#) that [our party](#), Podemos, has reached with the Spanish Socialist Workers' party (PSOE) does more than just open the door to the first joint government Spain has had since its return to democracy in 1977. It could also help us confront the crisis within our political system. But to do so, we in the next government will have to show ourselves capable of facing up to the [Catalan conflict](#) and to the fact that Spain is a plurinational country. That will call for dialogue and empathy.

We will also need to halt the rise of the far right through social policies that act as a safety net for the most vulnerable at a time when the economic slowdown once again threatens what's left of the welfare state in [Europe](#).

The new government will have much to thank organised civil society for – particularly the feminist movement, pensioners, the young people who have mobilised over the climate emergency, and workers' organisations. They will play a key role in the next few years.

From an international point of view, perhaps the most notable thing about this month's election was the surge of the far right. The rise of an avowedly neo-Francoist party in the fourth-largest economy in the eurozone – a party that shares its racist and reactionary philosophy with similar groups in other countries – is bad news for democrats and a sad novelty for [Spain](#).

Until very recently, ours was one of the few European countries not to have such a grouping – mainly because the conservative People's party (PP) was able to accommodate a huge number of different rightwing tendencies, from liberals and Christian democrats to those of a more reactionary and ultra-Catholic persuasion. The Vox party, however, differs significantly from its European allies in its origins and beliefs. Its principal leaders emerged from the PP, and Vox remains a monarchist, pro-Nato party with a clear neoliberal economic outlook.

While it may well go on to gradually adopt more protectionist language and policies, Vox's momentum hasn't been fuelled by the effects of globalisation on poorer neighbourhoods, nor by the fears of parts of the Spanish population about immigration. It emerged because of the way in which the Spanish right – the PP and Citizens parties – [approached the Catalan crisis](#).

“Ultraconservative groups and pundits have normalised extreme-right discourse”

Their showdown with the Catalan independence movement and their mutual competition to see who

could come up with the harsher solution resulted in the electoral collapse of Citizens, which was supposedly a liberal, centrist party. It has also left the PP beholden to Vox as its only possible partner – and with whom it already governs various Spanish regions and town and city councils.

But Vox's success is also down to a Spanish media ecosystem in which ultraconservative media groups and pundits have normalised extreme-right discourse, and in which some progressive sectors have perhaps reckoned – as François Mitterrand did with the Front National in France in the early 1990s – that turning Vox into a topic of perennial political debate would scare the centre left into mobilising.

That certainly happened in the [April general election](#), when the PSOE won a convincing victory. But it also meant Vox was in a position to grow on its own.

The recent election campaign, coinciding not only with the [exhumation of General Franco's body](#), but also with the [sentencing of the jailed Catalan independence leaders](#) – the latter of which provoked huge demonstrations and riots in Catalonia – was the fuel that powered the surge of the far right.

Above all, this general election has confirmed for the fourth time – we've had four elections in as many years – that the era of the two-party system in Spain is well and truly over.

- Pablo Iglesias is secretary-general of [Podemos](#)

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