

GOVERNING WITH RESPONSIBILITY, HUMILITY, AND COMPROMISES

The results and evaluation of the elections of November 20, 2011 in Spain

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Abstract

Spain is the third southern country to undergo a government change because of the serious economic crisis. At the early elections organized at the 20th of November, 2011 the conservatives have won with an enormous victory, they reached absolute majority. In the history of the socialists this is the toughest defeat ever. What kind of echoes did this remarkable change made in the country? That's for sure that the new government won't really have time to celebrate, as they have to face with serious problems in the following years.

Keywords: Spain, economic crisis, Mariano Rajoy Brey, People's Party (PP), Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), autonomous communities, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero

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The Spanish elections were held at the 20th of November 2011. Officially it was supposed to be held at March 2012, after the end of the political cycle of the leader of the PSOE, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The early elections show the seriousness of the current economic crisis at Spain. The survey made some weeks before the elections predicted the victory of the leader of the PP, Mariano Rajoy Brey, against the leader of the PSOE, Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba.

Naturally, the Spanish press published many articles about the early elections and the results. Days after the elections I observed the two largest newspapers, the socialist *El País* and the liberal *El Mundo*. These two newspapers were sufficient to see clearly the results and the reviews, since a lot of articles were published about this in the days after the elections. The *El País* is the best-selling daily newspaper of Spain, a total of 473.407 editions, while the *El Mundo* sells 383.713 copies.¹

The elections were closed at the midnight of the 20th of November. According to the surveys the winner was the leader of the PP, Mariano Rajoy Brey, who could take the seat of the prime minister at the 21th of November. With processing 100% of the votes the PP got 10.830.693, while the PSOE got 6.973.880 votes. The PP has all together 186 Members of Parliament now, with means he gained absolute majority. In contrast the PSOE got now 110 Members of Parliament, which is a very bad result, proving the total failure of the socialists ("hundimiento socialista").² In the Spanish press the victory is considered to have been led by two reasons: the current economic crisis, and the failure unsuccessfulness of the socialist party. Besides these two reasons, in one of the articles of the *El País* they indicate that the enthusiasm and adequate program of Rajoy have contributed to this great victory.

In the case of Spain, it's worthy to examine the 17 autonomous communities and provinces. There are 15 communities where the PP conquered total victory; ergo all of the provinces of the community gave their votes to the party ruled by Rajoy. These autonomous communities are the following: Galicia, Asturias, Aragon, La Rioja, Valencia, Navarra, Murcia, Canary Islands, Ceuta, Melilla, Extremadura, Castilla y León, Madrid, Castilla la Mancha and Cantabria. But at the Basques we can find differences: all of the three provinces voted to different political powers: at Vizcaya the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), at Guipúzcoa the Spanish coalition (Amaiur), at Alava the PP conquered. At Catalonia the PP was defeated as well, in three provinces: Tarragona, Gerona and Lérida the Convergence and Union (CiU, Catalan nationalist party) won, while at Barcelona the PSOE acquired the leading role. At Andalusia the PP almost succeeded to reach total win, only the PSOE gathered more votes only at Sevilla province. Furthermore, Rajoy obtained almost half of the municipalities, thus he won't need to conclude an alliance with any of the other parties while governing.

¹ http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Pa%C3%ADs; és [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Mundo_\(Espa%C3%B1a\)](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Mundo_(Espa%C3%B1a))

² *El País*, CARLOS E. CUÉ, España entrega al PP todo el poder, 21/11/2011

The authors of the *El País* highlight the absolute victory of the PP with different attributives, for example historical victory („historica victoria”), historical top („techo histórico”), indisputable victory („contundente victoria”), open victory („rotunda victoria”).³ They emphasize that the 186 Members of Parliament outshine the results of his mentor’s, Aznar’s who gained absolute majority at 2000 as well. In contrary, in connection with PSOE we can realize that they often repeat the fact that this is the biggest failure in the history of the PSOE.

The euphoric satisfaction and joy of Rajoy is indicated in more articles’ as well („euforia contenida”). Furthermore many have written what he had said in these moments: “I will govern without discrimination and intolerance. Nobody has to worry.” (“Gobernaré sin sectarismo. Nadie tiene que sentir inquietud”)⁴

Another article quotes Rubalcaba’s opinion: “We can clearly see that we have lost the elections.” (“Hemos perdido claramente las elecciones”). But we have to notice that the articles of the *El País* do not underline the facts about the opposition, but about Rajoy. The same article tells about the political history of Rajoy, who has a political experience of 26 years, and a 30 years experience in public leadership, he was the president of the delegates at Pontevedra between 1983-1986, the vice-president of Xunta de Galicia between 1986-1987, as well as the minister of Education, Home Affairs and Public Administration, and between 1996-2003 the representative of the government and its vice-president. They added that Rajoy failed at the last two elections, or even he received attacks from members of his party because of mistrust. In the article we can read about his future tasks: raising the pensions of more than 8,5 millions of pensioners, make a decision about the salaries of 31, millions of public servants, since they are frozen for 1,5 years now, and saving up 16.000 million of Euros as soon as possible to decrease the governmental deficit with 4,4% and to meet the European requirements.⁵

On the webpage of the *El País* we can find the opinions of the most important international presses about the Spanish situation. The *BBC* refers to phenomenon that the elections of Spain at the 20th of November, 2011 were mostly like a referendum generated by the economic crisis. It mentions that before the closing of the elections it was known that the conservatives will win, and it also tells that there weren’t such a big victory at Spain since the death of Franco at 1975. At last they emphasize that Rajoy will not really have time to celebrate his victory, because the given economic situation does not let this. The *Financial Times* attach the change in Spain to the economic crisis and giant debt as well. The victory of the PP means the last government change in the Euro-zone – following Ireland, Portugal, Greece and Italy – as a result of the actual crisis. (“La victoria del PP significa el último cambio de Gobierno en la eurozona –a continuación de Irlanda, Portugal, Grecia e Italia- como resultado de la crisis de deuda.”). The *CNN* highlights the moment of the recounting of the votes. The article shows the dark, gloomy environment, which was around Rubalcaba, when the fact of his defeat was realizable. The *CNN* does not discredit the change in the Spanish government, since Spain is the third country who have lost its government because of the European financial crisis, The *New York Times* underlines the economic crisis too as the reason of the governmental change: The Spanish people, who fight against the high unemployment rate and debts, after almost 8 years of socialist leading the conservative PP was elected hoping that this government will solve the problems made by the crisis (“Los españoles que luchan con el alto desempleo y la presión del crédito ha emitido un veredicto sobre los casi ocho años del Gobierno socialista, y han elegido al conservador Partido Popular con la esperanza de que alivie la pena de la crisis de la deuda de Europa”).⁶

I would like to emphasize one of the articles of the *El País*, because it focuses on the facts said by the new prime minister at the moment of his victory. “I promise that I will govern without discrimination, intolerance, with responsibility, humility and compromises.” (“Prometo gobernar sin sectarismo”, “con responsabilidad”, “con humildad y con compromiso”). Furthermore it was said that nobody has to worry, the only enemy is the economic crisis (“Nadie tiene que sentir inquietud” y “el único enemigo es la crisis económica”). Rajoy added that after the difficult years he can now own a significant majority (“Han sido años difíciles, pero hoy podemos decir que tenemos una mayoría muy importante”). According to his colleagues, Rajoy is able to create a stable situation, he is said to be a talented politician. According to his

³ *El País*, LUIS R. AIZPEOLEA, Rajoy, a gobernar la crisis, 21/11/2011

El País, CARLOS E. CUÉ, España entrega al PP todo el poder, 21/11/2011

El País, JOSÉ MANUEL ROMERO, Rajoy supera hasta la marca de Aznar, 21/11/2011

⁴ *El País*, JOSÉ MANUEL ROMERO, Rajoy supera hasta la marca de Aznar, 21/11/2011

El País, CARLOS E. CUÉ, España entrega al PP todo el poder, 21/11/2011

El País, FERNANDO GAREA, Rajoy promete gobernar “sin sectarismo”, 21/11/2011

⁵ *El País*, JOSÉ MANUEL ROMERO, Rajoy supera hasta la marca de Aznar, 21/11/2011

⁶ *El País*, La prensa internacional atribuye la victoria de Rajoy a la crisis, 20/11/2011

backbiters Rajoy's victory is only thanks to the given circumstances, ergo the current crisis and the unemployment made the government fail making Rajoy's absolute majority.⁷

In the case of elections, we should not disregard the scale of participation. At the elections of 2011 71,69% of the population was present, while at 2008 this scale is 73,85%, so this year less people went to vote. The abstention from voting grew with almost 3%, at 2008 26,5% of the population, at 2011 29,14% of the population stayed at home. In the weeks before the elections all of the parties drew attention to the importance of participation. Rubalcaba added that the rival he has to defeat is not the PP, but the abstention of the population against the voting. ("el Rival a batir no era el PP sino la abstención"). The number of the invalid votes and empty voting papers climbed as well. The invalid votes reached 1,25%, while the scale of the empty papers is 1,41%.⁸

Examining the articles of the *El Mundo* I discovered differences in the tone. It talks about the socialist PSOE in a very negative tone. Its articles are about Rajoy's big victory, and that the PSOE never ever suffered from this big defeat in the years of democracy. One of the articles starts like the results of the elections is not surprising ("Sin sorpresas").⁹ On the contrary the government of the PSOE is rudely downgraded. They say that there is no excuse found to the denials against the previous government since it was only "drinking" the different financial supports without any kind of defiance. ("Y, de nuevo, no será excusa para no hacerlo el rechazo de un sector que ha bebido, sin rechistar, de las ayudas oficiales durante todo el mandato").¹⁰ They identify that the PSOE got a very cruel punishment, not just because of the wrong leading of Zapatero, but they play down the campaign of the party as well, as the PSOE suggested its fear from the PP, and it consisted incoherent suggestions as well. The attributives used prove this as well: the most spectacular failure, ("hundimiento más espectacular"), very harsh punishment ("durísimo castigo").¹¹ Furthermore, in one of the articles the author obliges the PSOE to let the new party govern from now on ("Y creo que lo primero es obligar al PSOE,... que deje gobernar al PP desde hoy mismo"). In the same article it's written as well that from now on the European Union can be sure that Spain will not continue "caricature" which characterizes the country since 2004. ("Hoy mismo la Unión Europea debe saber que España no va a seguir siendo la caricatura de sí misma que hemos padecido desde 2004.").¹² The number of the abstention can justify the failure of the PSOE, nevertheless the *El Mundo* reminds its readers that the participation was high enough to get a representative result, hence this was a democratic victory.

On the contrary the opinion about the victory of the PP is rather positive. Besides the very good result they almost treat as a fact that the new prime minister, the new party is able to solve the serious situation at Spain. They also write that not just the PP reached victory, but Spain too, since from now on it will be under adequate leading.¹³ One of the articles draws attention to that although the new party will launch uncomfortable measures; however it is inevitable in the given serious economic situation. Also tells that some newly launched laws will not be accepted by many, but the party has to make these moves while not taking into consideration these opinions. From the sentences by Rajoy it is quoted that he will lead the country with responsibility and for everybody, and he will serve Spain and the Spanish people. ("con responsabilidad", "para todos", "Gobernaré al servicio de España y de los españoles.").¹⁴

Besides the two big political powers we cannot neglect the rise of the two smaller parties. The result of the party of Rosa Díez, the UpyD (*Democracy and Development Association*) and the IU led by Cayo Lara (Left Association) means a big change, because their political relevancy grew compared to the last years. For example the UpyD owns more voters at Madrid. According to the composition of the *El Mundi*, the worst news about the elections is the rising of the Spanish coalition (Amaior). It has reached enough votes to make a parliamentary faction. It has reached an outstanding result especially among the Basques. In this article they also add that the new government cannot disregard the actions of the coalition. Besides these two parties the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) can be proud to its better results as well.¹⁵

⁷ El País, FERNANDO GAREA, Rajoy promete gobernar "sin sectarismo", 21/11/2011

⁸ El País, La abstención sube un 3 %, 20/11/2011

⁹ El Mundo, Los españoles se han suamdo al cambio, 21/11/2011

¹⁰ El Mundo, CARLOS CUESTA, La mayoría necesaria, 21/11/2011

¹¹ El Mundo, Un poder sin precedentes para Rajoy, 21/11/2011

¹² El Mundo, F. JIMÉNEZ LOSTANTOS, A partir de hoy, 21/11/2011

¹³ El Mundo, CARLOS CUESTA, La mayoría necesaria, 21/11/2011

¹⁴ El Mundo, Un poder son precedentes para Rajoy, 21/11/2011

¹⁵ El Mundo, Un poder son precedentes para Rajoy, 21/11/2011

El Mundo, Los españoles se han suamdo al cambio, 21/11/2011

Already as a new prime minister, Rajoy's first declaration was that he will summon all the autonomous communities as soon as possible in order to jointly think over the measures with which they can face efficiently the given serious economic situation. ("Convocaré inmediatamente a todas las comunidades autónomas a una reflexión compartida para afrontar y coordinar las exigencias de esta grave situación.")¹⁶

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Thank you for your kind collaboration. *Editor-in-Chief*

¹⁶ El Mundo, CARMEN REMÍREZ DE GANUZA, „Gobernaré para que nadie se sienta excluido de la tarea común”, 21/11/2011