

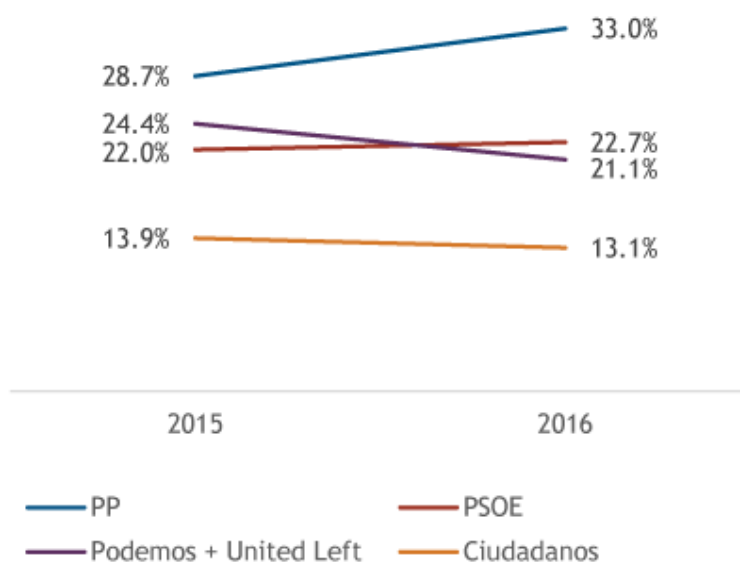
Is there still life in bipartidismo?

Blog post by Associate Adviser Roberto Robles, 28 June 2016

The story of Spain's December 2015 general election was fragmentation. Spain's historic two main parties - the centre-right PP and the centre-left PSOE - fell to just above a combined 50% of the vote in that election.

This weekend's election was widely expected to be similar. According to the polls, the PP would fall further and the PSOE would slip into third place behind an insurgent alliance between Podemos and the United Left parties. The possibility of Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias becoming the next Prime Minister with the support of the PSOE was discussed as a potential outcome.

Instead Spain's often derided 'bipartidismo' defied expectations and held steady. In fact it actually gained 5 percentage points. We don't really know why. The shock wave of Brexit uncertainty from the UK might have spooked a few voters back to the mainstream parties. The pull of the old duopoly might just have been underestimated by polls, or misrepresented to pollsters.



To a large extent, the divide between the old and new parties is a rural-urban and a generational one. Spain's many small towns and villages remain bastions of PP and PSOE support. The PP and the PSOE also overwhelmingly depend on older voters, with whom they have built loyalty over three decades and who often live in these smaller centres. Podemos and Ciudadanos find most of their support among younger voters. This has not gone unnoticed to the PP, and has had a clear impact on public policy, with the Rajoy government choosing to boost pensions while making public cuts elsewhere.

Fig: Spanish election results, vote share by party
Source: Spanish Electoral Commission

Whether this is the start of a sustained recovery for bipartidismo or a just a blip remains to be seen. But the demographics are a reminder that the

basic challenge for the PP and the PSOE is holding off generational churn in basic loyalties. Britain's 'radical' older voters seem to have just led Britain to the exit of the EU: for now Spain's older voters are the guardians of the status quo.