



PISM | POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

BULLETIN

No. 16 (1262), 6 February 2019 © PISM

Editors: Sławomir Dębski • Bartosz Wiśniewski • Rafał Tarnogórski

Anna Maria Dwyer • Sebastian Płóciennik • Patrycja Sasnal
Justyna Szczudlik • Jolanta Szymańska • Marcin Terlikowski • Tomasz Żornaczuk

The Effect of the Vox Party's Success on Spanish Politics

Maciej Pawłowski

In December 2018, the Spanish conservative party Vox unexpectedly received 10.97% of the votes in regional elections in Andalusia. It allowed the establishment of a centre-right government in the region. The polls show that the party also has the chance to introduce representatives to the European Parliament (EP). Also, their support could be necessary to create a centre-right coalition after the parliamentary elections that will take place at the latest in 2020. This coalition may implement some of Vox's demands, which would create new areas of collaboration between the governments of Poland and Spain.

The election results in Andalusia varied from the polls, which had indicated that the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) would continue its 36-year period of governing the region and that Vox would come away with only one mandate. Instead, Vox won 12 seats in the regional parliament and became a potential partner for the centre-right Peoples Party (PP) and Ciudadanos. Only PP negotiated with the conservatives because Ciudadanos refused because of the conservatives' negative position on Spanish legislation to protect women against violence. But on 22 January, a PP-Ciudadanos government, supported by Vox, was established. This led to massive protests by feminists, leftist parties, and trade unions all over Spain. However, Vox's support in Spain increased from 3% to 12% in polls. The party is fifth after PSOE (which polled at 24%), PP (21%), Ciudadanos (18%), and left-wing Unidos Podemos–UP (15%).

Reasons for Vox's Success. Vox was established in 2013 by former PP activists who were disappointed by what they considered to be moderate policy of the government under the PP leader at the time, Mariano Rajoy. Vox's leader, Santiago Abascal, is known as an opponent of Basque separatism and the party's general secretary, Javier Ortega Smith, is an activist advocating annexation of Gibraltar to Spain. The party claims it would make political changes: the liquidation of autonomous regions, de-legalisation of separatist parties, and enactment of historical policy rehabilitating the Gen. Francisco Franco regime. On social issues, the party's programme assumes an abortion ban, tax allowances for large families, and the abolishment of the gender-based violence law. On migration policy, Vox proposes the deportation of undocumented migrants and reducing migration from Africa by building wall on the border in Ceuta and Melilla and development aid for Sahel countries. On foreign policy, Vox claims it will support military participation in NATO missions against jihadists, the recovery of Gibraltar through diplomatic negotiations, and revision of EU treaties to restore competences to the Member States. The party also declares the need to suspend membership in the Schengen zone until the Catalan separatist leader Carles Puigdemont is extradited to Spain and the end of the uncontrolled flow of migrants.

Vox has succeeded in Andalusia despite having only a national programme without any regional postulates. Its supporters voted for it because of its ideas on migration, defence of a unified state, and fighting corruption. Earlier, the party's attempts to play an important role in Spanish politics were ineffective because of the Rajoy government's popularity. The potential for the conservatives to build up their electorate appeared in spring 2018 as a result of a decrease in support for PP from 30% to 20% after what is known as the Gürtel corruption scandal. Vox attracted voters by organising manifestations against the

[establishment of the socialist government of Pedro Sanchez on June 2018](#). They also criticised the government's decision to exhume the body of Gen. Franco from the mausoleum of the victims of the Spanish civil war (1936–1939) and its dialogue with the Catalan separatists. Moreover, the conservatives indicated that Sanchez hadn't taken advantage of the Brexit negotiations to recover Gibraltar for Spain and that [his administration is too soft on migration](#). Support of individual Vox demands has helped boost its potential electorate to about 15–20% of voters. A barrier to achieving this result could be the lack of party structures in 13 of Spain's 50 regional provinces.

Andalusia in Spanish Politics. The increase in Vox's support is a challenge for the centre-right parties. On the one hand, PP and Ciudadanos can fight for conservative voters by adopting similar ideas as Vox. They can claim they want to strengthen border controls, decrease the autonomous regions' competences, and de-legalise separatist organisations. Collaboration with Vox may be necessary to gain power on the national level in the future as well. On the other hand, this alliance would threaten the centre-right parties with a loss of moderate voters and raise controversy with their partners in the EP—PP is in the European People's Party (EPP) and Ciudadanos is in the liberal faction. Moreover, Ciudadanos has to choose between keeping to its strategy of soliciting right-wing voters and returning to the centrist party role played before the establishment of the Sanchez government.

As part of the campaigns for the European and local elections, left-wing parties are mobilising voters by using the fear of an increase in the conservatives' influence. UP leader Pablo Iglesias called for a common "anti-fascist resistance" after the announcement of the Andalusian elections results. PSOE and UP politicians together participated in manifestations against Vox. However, since January UP's cooperation with the minority government of Sanchez has been noticeably lacking. The party voted against a crucial decree that regulated tenancy terms. It also declared that its support for the 2019 budget, which hasn't been adopted yet, should not be taken as certain.

Vox's success is an impulse for the Catalan separatists to consider revising [their critical position of the state budget](#). Voting on adoption of the budget will take place in March and it may be important for the survival of the Sanchez government, which leads the dialogue with the separatists. After the announcement of the Andalusian elections result, Catalan MPs supported a budget-related law. However, after the disclosure of disagreements between PP, Ciudadanos, and Vox, the separatists returned to emphasising permission for the independence of Catalonia as a condition of their support for the budget.

Conclusions. The situation in Andalusia shows that there, the cooperation between centre-right parties and Vox in the national arena is possible. That may be important if Sanchez decides to call early parliamentary elections. Despite his declarations about governing until 2020, the rejection of the budget could force him to run the risk of elections, which could take place on 26 May along with the European and municipal elections. The result could be a distribution of seats in parliament similar to those in Andalusia. If PSOE is unable to form a coalition with Ciudadanos and UP, the establishment of a right-wing government will be possible, namely PP, Ciudadanos and Vox together, or PP-Ciudadanos with the support of Vox in return for agreeing to some demands.

The May elections will be the first serious test of Vox's popularity. In the European elections, maintaining the current level of support would lead to 5–7 seats in the EP. PP would lose some seats in that case, which will decrease the Spanish representation in the EPP. Vox's MEPs can join the European Conservatives and Reformists group or [the faction being put together by Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini](#).

If Vox wins influence in Spanish foreign policy, that could increase the areas of cooperation between the governments of Poland and Spain. The party holds views similar to the current Polish authorities on migration policy and military participation in NATO missions. Moreover, a right-wing Spanish government, seeking to not lose Vox's support, would be against the further delegation of power from the Member States to the EU. On the other hand, the demands to recover Gibraltar are unfavourable from the point of view of Polish interests because any action on that will make EU-UK relations more difficult.