

## Spain: : Nationalists triumph in Catalan poll, uncertainty over separatist agenda

*The snap parliamentary election in the Spanish region of Catalonia showed strong support for nationalist sentiment, but the outcome will bring much political and social uncertainty on both the regional and national level.*

<b>IHS Global Insight perspective</b>	
<b>Significance</b>	The Spanish region of Catalonia yesterday (25 November) held a snap parliamentary election, called two years ahead of schedule. The pre-election campaign was heavily influenced by increased nationalist sentiment triggered by the incumbent Convergence and Union (Convergència i Unió: CiU) of Artur Mas, who tried to trade on the public's discontent with Spain's economic crisis and increased his grip on the Catalan parliament.
<b>Implications</b>	The CiU won the poll, although it fell short of the required parliamentary majority and will be forced to team up with a more hard-line nationalist party, which is seen as the real winner of the Catalan election.
<b>Outlook</b>	The outcome will bring great uncertainty and could see Mas on a collision course with the central government in Madrid, which opposes secessionist attempts, while being under heavy pressure from nationalists to push for Catalonia's full independence, an topic that could open up all sorts of issues at a time when Spain needs unity the most.

### Political gamble

Catalan president Artur Mas was dealt a serious blow at yesterday's (25 November) parliamentary election in the Spanish region, which he called two years ahead of schedule (see [Spain: 22 November 2012: Catalonia braces itself for tense snap election amid surge in nationalist sentiment](#)). The pre-election campaign was heavily influenced by a sudden surge of nationalist sentiment, with Mas pledging to hold a referendum on Catalonia's sovereignty if his Convergence and Union (Convergència i Unió: CiU) party emerged victorious. The increased sentiment towards Catalonia's separation from Spain comes amid the continuing fiscal and economic problems faced by the country and its regions, with the increased central government's push for unpopular austerity policies not boding well for overall unity, nor the political popularity of the affected regional leaders. Trying to shift the attention from Catalonia's fiscal problems, Mas traded on the popular discontent and attempted to shift the responsibility onto Madrid, claiming that Catalonia diverts more funds to Madrid than it gets back in return. According to Mas, if the region were able to raise its own taxes and obtain greater fiscal autonomy, its fiscal crises would not have been so profound.

The issue quickly turned into a major propaganda campaign for Catalonia's independence – something that, unlike in the Basque Country, had to date remained mainly on the periphery of political and social debates. The political gamble grew out of proportion, however, with Mas facing increasing pressure to call for Catalonia's full independence rather than just greater fiscal sovereignty. The tone of the regional president, who was generally perceived as rather moderate in his pro-independence rhetoric, remained largely ambiguous, and it was only towards the end of the pre-election campaign when the tone of his messages turned intensely nationalistic.

### Bittersweet victory

Much to Mas's joy, the CiU won the poll. However, the victory was a bittersweet one, as the party lost 12 seats compared with the 2010 election and fell well short of the absolute majority it was after in the 135-member Catalan parliament. The biggest winner was the nationalist Catalan Republican Left (Esquerra Republicana: ERC), which saw its parliamentary representation more than double, and with a comfortable 21 seats it is seen as the most likely coalition partner for the CiU. The ERC was able to trade on the divided public and Mas's political gamble, as many hard-line nationalists were sceptical that Mas would fulfil his promises and guide Catalonia the whole way towards independence. Along with other republican parties, the "pro-independence" front in Catalonia will control as many as 87 seats, with the Initiative for Catalonia Greens (Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds: ICV) raising its parliamentary representation by 3 seats to 13, and the hard-line nationalist Popular Unity Candidates (Candidatura d'Unitat Popular: CUP) entering parliament with 3 seats.

Catalonian election results			
Party	2012 seats (out of 135)	2010 seats (out of 135)	
CiU	50	62	
ERC	21	10	
PSC	20	28	
PPC	19	18	
ICV	13	10	
C's	9	3	
CUP	3	0	
SI	0	3	
Independents	0	1	

### "The others"

The remaining seats will be divided among the Popular Party of Catalonia (Partido Popular de Cataluña: PPC), the Socialist Party of Catalonia (Partido de los Socialistas de Cataluña: PSC), and the Citizens – Party of the Citizenry (Ciudadanos – Partido de la Ciudadanía: C's), with the latter's representation having tripled. The C's managed to trade on popular discontent with the PSC, which is affiliated to the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español: PSOE) on the national level. The PSOE fared badly in the 2011 general election, not least over its perceived mismanagement of the Spanish fiscal crisis during its time in government, and the party has since seen its backing plummet. In Catalonia, the PSC leadership has increasingly started to lean towards more nationalist sentiment, which perhaps did not go down well with its core supporters, who perceived the party more as PSOE's representative on the Catalan level, rather than a supporter of the region's independence drive. The C's fortunes rose as it managed to trade on this discontent and presented itself as a credible opposition force with concise arguments against Catalonia's immediate departure from Spain, while also being headed by a young and charismatic leader. Going forward, the C's could contribute to the reshaping of the Catalan political scene, with the PSC's continuing decline in Catalonia potentially paving the way for its political gravity to expand.

As for the PPC – which is aligned nationally to the Popular Party of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy – the party saw its representation increase by one seat. This offers Rajoy some breathing space when it comes to the continuation of his austerity agenda; however, some critics have already pointed out that the PPC failed to trade on divisions in Catalan society when it comes to questions of independence versus national solidarity and unity, and its overall results in this respect are disappointing.

### Outlook and implications

The election outcome is bound to bring uncertainty on a political and social level both in Catalonia and possibly also the rest of Spain. Although the CiU and ERC are generally seen as nationalist parties, their vision for the future of Catalonia differs greatly. Whereas Mas is likely to opt for a more conciliatory tone with the Spanish government in Madrid and possibly have another go at renegotiating Catalonia's fiscal deal, the ERC will remain a strong supporter of full independence. With Rajoy strongly opposing any such attempts, Mas will find himself increasingly squeezed between Madrid's reluctance to negotiate and the ERC's pressure to go the whole way. In addition, with the CiU and ERC standing on opposite sides of the political spectrum (right and left, respectively), the two parties may also clash when it comes to the questions of economic and social policies – above all, austerity measures – heading further towards an internal conflict and instability within the political coalition. As a result, although the CiU-ERC coalition will look strong in numbers, in practical terms its stability will be far from guaranteed. With the ERC playing the role of kingmaker, it will make sure its voice is heard. Pushing for Catalonia's full independence could open up all sorts of issues, however, and undermine the picture of national unity that Rajoy desperately needs both at home and abroad.

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