

CATALONIAN ELECTIONS

Secessionists win elections – but the path to independence remains unclear

1 October 2015





MAS DISAPPOINTMENT

On 27 September Catalonia celebrated one of the most controversial and unprecedented regional elections of its democratic history.

Pro-independence parties won the elections but lost their so-called 'plebiscite on independence': the 'Junts pel Sí' coalition (JxSí, Together for a Yes) won 62 seats and the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), a left-wing pro-Catalonian independence party won ten 10. Together, they took more than 53% of the seats but only 47.8 % of the popular vote.

The Catalanian President and main proponent of the JxSí coalition, Artur Mas (*pictured*), had failed to get the majority vote he wanted, but still vowed to push forward with the breakaway movement.

Mas, who did not lead the JxSí candidates due to many unpopular social measures and corruption scandals in his CDC party, suffered a second disappointment when the CUP said it would not back his re-appointment as Catalanian premier.

After the election, Mas was charged with civil disobedience for holding an illegal referendum in 2014.

A POLARISED OPPOSITION

The non-secessionist Ciudadanos (Citizens, or C's) party won 25 seats in the regional Parliament, up from the nine it won in the 2012 elections. Although the party was born in and previously ran only in Catalonia, it is emerging as a force across Spain.

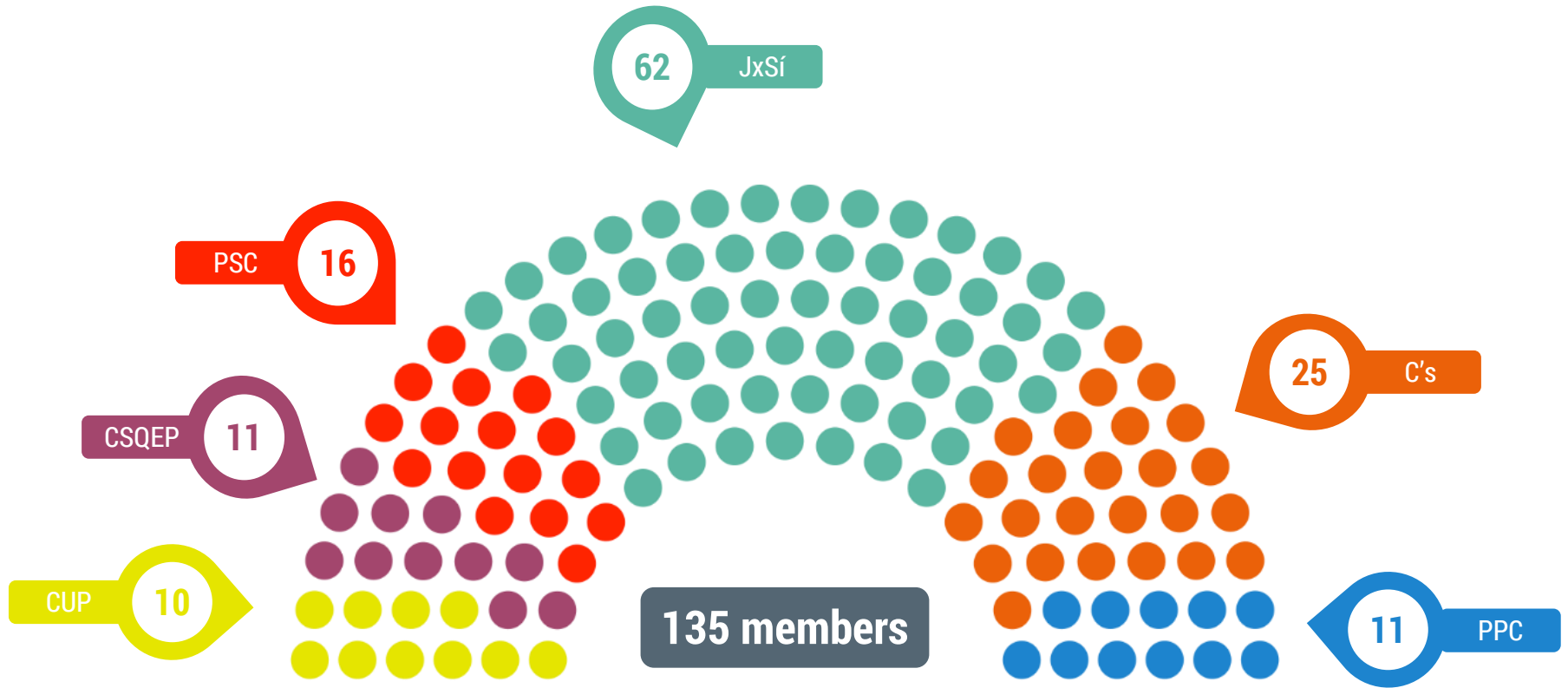
The party, led by Albert Rivera (*pictured*), combines centre-left ideas (such as on social policy) with liberal economics. It will look to make a splash in the Spanish parliamentary elections in December.

C's increased share of the vote came in part at the expense of the conservative People's Party (PP – PPC in Catalonia), which governs Spain and positioned itself as one of the major guarantors of the country's unity of Spain. The PP lost 120,000 votes.

The Catalan Socialist Party (PSC) lost only a thousand votes, but four seats, due to the electoral system. Meanwhile 'Catalunya Sí que es Pot' (Catalonia Yes We Can, CSQEP), the leftist bloc that includes the anti-austerity party Podemos, lost ground, taking only 11 seats. It had expected more after good results in May's local elections.



CATALONIAN PARLIAMENT POST-ELECTION





WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Independence in Catalonia is now unlikely, at least in the short term. The CUP, whose support for a unilateral declaration of independence would have been vital, ruled it out as *“the plebiscite was not won”*.

Inter-party negotiations will now begin, and groups other than JxSí have made clear that they do not back the investiture of Mas for a new term. However, if a consensus is not reached, Mas could be instated during a second round of voting with a simple majority. If the CUP abstained, Mas would need to win more votes than a candidate from the anti-independence parties.

Following the election, Spanish PM Mariano Rajoy (*pictured*) offered the Catalan government *“dialogue and institutional loyalty”* within the bounds of the law, but made clear that the government’s position had not changed.

Catalonia’s future remains uncertain until a new regional government is formed, but we know that Artur Mas – who has been thought to be bluffing for some time – has now lost his last hand. With JxSí, he bet his future on one last card, but failed to get the indisputable victory he needed.

LOOKING TO DECEMBER

The Spanish election campaign kicked off in Catalonia, with all the national lead candidates getting ready for the firing of the starting pistol for December's national poll.

Emerging parties will play a key role in these elections, since they will be essential to coalition talks if there is no absolute majority.

Everything points in that direction now, and Ciudadanos will have a great impact, given their rapid increase in support.

However, Podemos (led by Pablo Iglesias, *pictured*), which seemed to be leading a sea-change in Spanish politics, has seen its support level off and begin to fall in national polls.

The election will be held in December.



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