

¿Qué? Podcast, Season 1, Episode 12: What's Going to Happen at the Spanish Elections?

Many thanks to listener Ryan V. for the transcript!

Melissa: But they waited for the baby (laughs)

Simon: Hello Everybody! My name is Simon Hunter, I'm the editor of the English edition of El País and this is *Que?!* A podcast from El País that tries to explain to our beloved English-speaking audience the finer points of what is happening in Spain right now. Whether you're a Hispanophile who can't get enough of everything that's happening on the Iberian peninsula or a migrant – not an expat – who has chosen to make a home on these shores, we are here for you; “Cuenta con nosotros.” So sit back, relax, and let us break down anything that you see about Spain that makes you say “Why exactly does Madrid have a cable car?”

As usual I'm here with my colleague from the English edition, Melissa Kitson. Hello Melissa!

Melissa: Hello!

Simon: How are you?

Melissa: I'm good, yeah, I'm excited.

Simon: This is episode 12 of our podcast and the last in this first season. I think we can call it a first season can't we? 12 weeks Melissa! It's a fantastic achievement. I don't think I've ever been this committed to anything in my life. Certainly not my, you know, yoga class which I'm always skipping and things like that. How do you feel?

Melissa: No, I agree. It's been, it's been fun. I feel like –

Simon: You didn't convince us.

Melissa: No, I was just, I was thinking of my, perhaps I'm more committed to yoga but no I wasn't committed to this podcast

Simon: Definitely! Yeah, it's been, it's been great. It's been really really really good fun. We've had fantastic feedback from, uh, our listeners. As I do every week, I encourage you to get in touch with us. We'll be back after Easter, but that doesn't mean you can't get in touch with us in the meantime. You can tweet me @simoninmadrid with the hashtag #QuePodcast or you can send me a direct message on Twitter, or you can email englishedition@elpais.es. We've had some mmmm good messages this week from Oisin Tomee, I'm not so, well, as you know your twitter handle is a lot easier. It's @thattomeefella (laughs) I've got no idea where this person is from, but they say – he, she, I don't know – they say @simoninmadrid loving the pod. Always find it a great way of catching up on some of the random things in Spanish life. A random one which always interests me is Spanish telly. From strange game shows like *Ahora Caigo* to the marathon of TV that seems to be *Salvame*. Well, I would have to watch Spanish TV to ask that question properly and I'm uh, afraid I refuse to watch Spanish television. The intrusive advertising – they do this thing - they cut off movies for ad breaks at inopportune moments. They're

always putting, you know, images over the, the TV. They're advertising other TV programs while you're watching one TV program, and then they do this thing - you stick with a film on Spanish TV, and just when it's getting to the conclusion and the most interesting bit of the film they stick like a 15 minute ad break in at the end of the movie.

TV commercial: *Volvemos en siete minutos*

Simon: The TV shows start late. Prime time in Spain seems to be like between like 10 pm and 3 am. There's all these like, Master Chef shows they're all, all the critics are always complaining about that. And they move programs around the schedules, so you never know when anything's on. I think, you know, I - oh god - when I first moved to Spain it was in the year 2000, and um, literally you know the only entertainment I had was 5 VHS tapes of *Friends* and I watched those and wore them down, rather than succumb to watching Spanish TV. And as for *Salvame*, my god, if anyone doesn't know what *Salvame* is, it's just like, it is the most basic televis-it's like a load of Z-list Spanish celebrities, just sitting around, slagging off other Z-list Spanish celebrities. It's just, it's appalling, but - I have to say - it's completely compulsive. Members of my wife's family will watch it sometimes when we're up, we're up in the pueblo, and it'll be on, you know, in the background and I find myself getting drawn into it. It's one of those things. It's the ultimate guilty pleasure.

Then I also had an email from our friend Chris Thompson. Now I've mentioned Chris. Chris was the gentleman with whom I was corresponding late on a Saturday night as I was getting into bed because obviously I'm a father of two small children so I have no life and I get into bed early on a Saturday night. He says "Hi Simon and Melissa. Lots this week. I'll try to be brief, something I find difficult." And that's definitely true Chris, it was a very very long email so I'm going to try and gallivant through it and take a bit, uh, a few bits out. We were talking about Brexit last week, and he was responding and talking about Britains in Spain. He said "They basically live in Alicante, Malaga Province and both sets of islands. The ones you know" -as in the ones that we know - "the youngest professionals, live in Madrid and Barcelona, But in Merida, Palencia, etc. we don't exist." He says "I live in inland Alicante. We live in the sticks but our principal town has about 800 people, 500 of whom are Brits. My Spanish is terrible, but I still get to help people when they have to go to hospital because their Spanish is non-existent. They don't know who Santi Abascal, or Risto Mejide are. They-" he said, that's in reference to politicians and a TV presenter - he says of these um, British people in Spain, "They do drink a lot." So kind of living up to some, eh, expat clich- Oh I said expat! Ah! Migrant - British migrant - clichés there. Expat is a word that we try not to use. "You were talking about applying for Spanish nationality" - obviously that was in the context of the Brexit conversation- "Even if there were not a 2 year waiting list, what percentage of the Britons living here could answer the questions 'who is responsible for calling a general election in Spain?' (that's an example of one of the questions) "And how many would pass the language level test of A2/B1?" And he concludes "oh I really enjoy the podcast. I approve of the mocking of we Brits here on the costas" I'm sorry I feel really bad about that Chris. I hope we don't come across as mocking. Kind of connected to Brexit, and we're, oh god it's Tuesday what day is it? It's Groundhog Day! The second of April and we're still none the wiser as to what's gonna happen with Brexit. It's just, it's just unbelievable. And to add insult to injury this is a bit of podcast news for you here, some bright spark somewhere in the British government has decided to insert an advert about Brexit into every single one of the podcasts that I listen to. I listen to a lot of podcasts and all of the BBC podcasts are starting with this incredibly irritating little ad:

BBC ad: Are you a UK national living in Spain? As the UK prepares to leave the EU, there may be changes that affect you.

Simon: Basically reminding me of the fact that we're stuck in Brexit hell, and that we don't know what's going on, so you are ruining my listening experience and if I never hear that podcast ad, uh, again it will be too soon.

BBC ad: -the latest information in the UK government's 'Living in Spain' guide.

Simon: And then we have our star letter this week. Now this is a quality letter. It's from um...David. It says "Hi Simon I discovered this podcast a few weeks ago and I'm really liking it so far. I do have a question regarding the Spanish Socialist Party. I see in the polls that they are ahead and look likely to be the largest party in Spain's parliament. This seems to contrast to Europe more widely. We've seen center-left parties like Labour in the UK and the socialists in France struggle in the last decade. However, in Spain, this seems not to be the case. What is it about the Spanish socialists that makes them successful, and what lessons could be learned by other European center-left parties?"

Now if we asked Melissa this question, she would probably swoon and say 'Ooooh, Pedro Sanchez! Pedro Sanchez!' Uh, Melissa has a little crush on Pedro Sanchez, who is a renowned Socialist Party leader in Spain. Renowned for being uh, somewhat of a uh, handsome man. But, I think we need a more in-depth- we need a slightly more in-depth um, answer to that fantastic question from David. So, let's turn to our big topic then, which is:

Music

The upcoming elections. The general election in Spain is coming up on April the 28th. We've covered the kind of background of why the election was called on previous podcasts, so why don't you bring us up to date to what's been happening since we discussed this topic.

Melissa: Yeah, so, a lot has been happening and the biggest news really from last week was about the Spanish conservative party called the Popular Party and some very disturbing claims about abortion. So in our previous podcast on the women's march in Spain, we mentioned that the leader of the PP, Pablo Casado, wanted to bring back the restrictive 1985 abortion law, which only allowed terminations in very limited cases. But it seemed many people in his party did not think this position was going to win the party votes at the April 28th elections, so there was this sort of general decision oh he's not going to include it in the election campaign and let's try to bury the debate, but then, in comes Adolfo Suarez Illana.

Adolfo Suarez Illana: Es una vocacion de servicio y es el momento de poner lo mejor de uno mismo al servicio de lo que cree

Melissa: So Suarez Illana is the PP's star signing. He's the elder son of Adolfo Suarez Gonzales, Spain's first democratically elected prime minister after the 1975 transition to democracy. He is second on the candidate list after Casado, and he's supposedly someone who's going to bring star power to the PP's campaign. Well, this did not happen. So, this seemingly respectable figure does a radio interview last week:

Adolfo Suarez Illana: Eso es una vida. Seguro. Si no lo tocamos eso acaba sin duda en una vida.

Melissa: And puts abortion you know, right back center stage with a series of incendiary statements.

Adolfo Suarez Illana: Los neandertales también lo usaban. Lo que pasa es que esperaban a que naciera y, entonces, le cortaban la cabeza.

Melissa: He tells Madrid based station Onda Cero 'Abortion has been around for 100,000 years. The Neanderthals also used it, but they waited for the baby to be born and then cut off its head'.

Simon: I hope you can hear, I hope the listeners can hear me shaking my head.

Melissa: Yeah, it gets worse. He then lumped the death tolls for tragic, for traffic accidents, suicide and abortion all together and argued that women have to decide between being the mothers of a dead child or a living child. But perhaps the most brazen claim was that New York had just approved a law which allows abortion after birth.

Adolfo Suarez Illana: En Nueva York, ahora, se acaba de aprobar una ley, por la cual se permite el aborto despues del nacimiento, que es curioso.

Melissa: So this is a real egg-on-face moment for the PP. Suarez Illana was forced to apologize.

Adolfo Suarez Illana: He estado todo la tarde, buscando si era correcta o no era correcta mi afirmacion sobre esa ley.

Melissa: He said "I spent all afternoon looking to see if my affirmation was correct or not and an office in New York confirmed that it is not correct."

Adolfo Suarez Illana: Y un despacho en Nueva York me confirma que no es correcta.

Simon: You can't kill a baby after it's been born. Who, who would have thought?

Melissa: Very surprising. And, these comments have really upset the more moderate members of the PP, you know, they've been described as embarrassing, barbaric, unacceptable. But what is really interesting about this debacle is that it once again points to how the PP has moved further to the right. So many PP politicians who are ministers or who held important positions under former Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy have been purged from the candidate list, and in their place Casado has named newer and more far-right figures. Only 10 people in the top 52 on the list are running for congress again for the PP. So, in other words, 42 politicians have been replaced by signings like Suarez Illana. Now why – why is this so? – what's the reason behind this shift? The answer again comes back to Vox.

Vox as we've talked about before is a far-right party founded by former members of the PP and it's a party that is threatening to steal a large chunk of the PP's voter base. According to a new poll, 20% of former PP voters now prefer Vox. In fact, less than half of the people who voted for the PP in the 2016 elections, will vote for them again this year, according to that poll. Even PP politicians have switched allegiances, and many – you know – who used to be with the PP and now representing Vox at the next elections. Uh, in other words the PP is in bad shape.

Casado's response to this has been to move to the right. But there are concerns within the party, particularly those who are more aligned with Rajoy that Casado's letting Vox set the agenda, and that this strategy is not going to stop the voter drain. With less than a month to go we're already seeing political parties pull out all the stops to win voters, be it on Twitter, Whatsapp or Facebook. And

Facebook interestingly has announced a new tool to increase transparency ahead of the Spanish elections. Political parties and candidates campaigning in elections are now required to complete ad authorizations and place “paid for by” exclaimers on all their ads until the end of the election period. It is – I mean – as we head towards the election, it is going to be interesting to see whether Casado’s strategy pays off or not.

Simon: I mean abortion...why don't they just leave it alone? When are they going to learn? It's really weird, and this is not the first – I mean, well – this is you know the umpteenth time that someone from the PP – and it's always a man – who, you know, wades into this uh, abortion debate and I just don't understand why they keep wading into this debate but, Pablo Casado, who's been a controversial candidate as leader of the Popular Party pretty much since he arrived on the scene because he was caught up in that whole scandal about these fraudulent Master's Degrees, he claims he did nothing wrong but there's serious, pretty serious irregularities uh, in the, in this master's degree that he's got. He's talking about, you know being even more hardcore in Catalonia than the previous PP government. The previous PP government after the declaration of Independence in Catalonia in October 2017 basically they invoked article 155 of the Spanish constitution which allowed them to suspend the region's autonomous powers. I mean, he's talking about going back to a new Article 155 in Catalonia, you know doing the same thing without anything as – you know – drastic having happened as a declaration of independence and he wants to get involved in all sorts of areas of Catalan society such as the education system and the regional TV channel, TV3, which is often criticized for its uh, you know its perceived bias, its pro-independence slant. For example, it's just been told to stop referring to the politicians who are currently being tried in the Supreme Court for their role in the independence drive, it's been constantly challenged it's been constantly referring to them as political prisoners and you know it's been instructed to stop doing that which it kind of has but it's using some other sort of phrase to get around it so he wants to, he wants to get right in, so Casado is just desperate to get his hands dirty in Catalonia which um, I think we can probably predict would be absolutely you know catastrophic in terms of the reaction that it would um provoke within society, within, within Catalonia. Probably be completely counter-productive. But this is, I mean, this is interesting, this is kind of almost playing into the hands of the Socialist Party in that they've got this – let's talk about fragmentation – you know we used to have this two party system in Spain, you know in very recent you know the country's very recent history and now it's just insane now when you compare the situation now to just a decade ago. And the right has completely fragmented. You've got the Popular Party you've got Ciudadanos (Citizen's) and then of course you've got Vox. The last polling for El País suggested that the combination of Ciudadanos, the Popular Party and Vox wouldn't actually be enough to form a government after the upcoming general elections. It looks more likely that the Socialist Party and Podemos (the anti-austerity party Podemos), would indeed have just about enough votes with support from other, smaller parties to form a government, but this, this is dangerous for the Socialist party. Historically, when it looks like the Socialists are gonna win, uh, an election that tends to de-motivate their supporters who actually go out and vote. Interestingly – we mentioned this in a previous podcast – but the timing of the um, elections just after Easter week is actually going to affect the way that the parties are going to campaign. The Socialist party has decided that it's not going to be campaigning during those days because it just doesn't seem to be much point you know everyone's going to be caught up in their um, fiestas and also so many people are going to be on holiday in that week as well so they're going to focus on um, areas such as Catalonia, the Basque country, um, during that um, that time. This is interesting, on Sunday we had a big demonstration in Madrid about people complaining, er demonst- er, protesting against the

depopulation of Spain in this- which is a massive issue that's facing Spain that um, you know these uh villages that the population is just dwindling and they don't have shops and they don't have resources and they don't have train stations and they don't have, you know, proper internet connections. So it's a real um, it's a real issue, and you've seen um, politicians you know you've seen the Ciudadanos (The Citizens) leader Albert Rivera and the PP leader Pablo Casado jumping into um, tractors on the pre campaign –and this is the thing – we're still in the pre-campaign trail. We haven't actually kicked off the proper campaign yet. That starts um, next week so it's all to play for. It's going to be really really interesting. I mean, I think the one thing we can predict now – let's see, let's, we should – make a note Veronica our producer – make a note for this is our prediction of what's gonna happen that um, it's gonna be no clear winner at this election. We'll have to come back afterwards and see what uh, our prediction is. Would you like to make a prediction uh – would you, is your, is your handsome man Pedro Sanchez gonna be prime minister again, do you think?

Melissa: I don't know. As you said I think there is a risk that people like “oh look, you know, that they're ahead in the polls. That's that. Also I think there is a tendency to underestimate how popular Vox is. You know, the same thing happened with Trump in the U.S. that no one actually wants to say they're voting for Vox. So I think they're going to win more seats than the polls have predicted, and I think it will be very, very close.

Simon: Definitely. Yeah, it's going to be really, really interesting.

Alright! Well that was episode 12, and that was season one of our “Que?!” podcast. I hope we've enlightened you a little bit today about the upcoming elections. We didn't have time this week to tell you about the Spanish woman who just won her court case after she found a pen drive on the floor of the dental clinic where she worked, and when she checked it discovered that it contained a video that her boss had secretly filmed of her getting changed. The case was appealed by the man responsible, and even went as far as the Supreme Court, despite the fact that during one of the recordings, you can hear the man say “Knickers”

Melissa: What!?

Simon: And we didn't have time to tell you about the story that told us that 75% of samples of hashish available on the streets of Madrid have been analyzed by scientists and it turns out they contain high levels of E. Coli, basically meaning that they have been contaminated with fecal matter. Turns out that smugglers swallow these small acorns of hash wrapped in cling film, take a laxative once in Spain, and then put them on sale. 40% of the samples that the scientists found, actually smelled of feces. And of course, we didn't have time to tell you about our most read story from last week which actually came from Portugal for a change – “Madonna's farewell from Portugal turned sour over a row involving a horse” - that was the headline. The subhead was “The pop icon could not get permission to allow the animal inside a 19th century palace for a music video shoot, and has since accused the Portuguese of being ungrateful.

My name is Simon Hunter

Melissa: I'm Melissa Kitson

Simon: I'm gonna take those headphones away from you, they're distracting you! This was season 1 of “QUE?!” a podcast that tries to explain what happens in Spain to those of us who sometimes get a little

bit lost in translation. This is an El País production. It was recorded right here in the El País newsroom under the expert guidance of our fantastic producer Veronica Figueroa, and you can listen to it on your favorite podcast app. We'll be back after Easter with a brand new host of issues. Thank you for listening! Adios!

Melissa: Ciao!