

¿Qué? Podcast, Season 2, Episode 1: Results of the Spanish election

Many thanks to listener Ryan V. for the transcript!

Simon: Hello Everyone! My name is Simon Hunter, I'm the editor of the English edition of El País and this is ¿Qué?! 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 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 were bull fighters running for congress on Sunday?"

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

Melissa: Hello Simon!

Simon: How are you?

Melissa: I'm good.

Simon: I'm trying to get the energy up because we're both really exhausted. It's been a long and exciting week.

Melissa: It has. We were here all Sunday for, for obvious reasons and – that we will soon talk about.

Simon: Yup.

Melissa: And we're still recovering from the excitement.

Simon: Exactly, and this is episode one of season two. We left it, we left closed season uh, one of our podcast just before Easter. I then went off on a lovely Easter holiday leaving you here, you poor thing. And I'm just about to go off and take a May day break as well. You don't seem to want to take any holiday, uh Melissa.

Melissa: I, I'm often of the thought that it's better to take holidays when people aren't on holidays.

Simon: Yes, well that is a very good point, which is great for me because it means I can go and get some rest. I'm also recoverin- I'm still bleary-eyed after last week. My son stuck his finger in my eye so hard he scratched my cornea and I had to take two days off work just before the elections. So, all-in-all it's been a pretty uh, pretty exciting uh, pretty exciting week. Now, in our absence we have had some fantastic emails and communications from our beloved listeners. Thank you to everyone who has gotten in

contact. To start with: Rebecca Salama. She says “Dear Simon and Melissa, after binge-listening to your first 9 shows in what I believe must be a record-breaking 3.5 hours, I’ve just reached the drunken pimple episode.” The drunken pimple episode? Now we are a serious news organization. I can’t imagine which episode involved a drunken pimple. She says “It seems like an opportune moment to recharge my airpods and send you a quick email. In summary, I’m loving the podcast. It touches on many issues of interest to me as a British person who has been living in Spain for the past 10 years. I’m actually in the process of applying for citizenship through the Sephardic route (something we might discuss in a future episode) in order to avoid having to hand over my UK passport. Easier said than done though. I thought filing my taxes was a pain, but this is a brand new ballgame. Thanks again, and good luck with the rest of the series.” So thank you very much Rebecca.

Then we got this lovely email from Caroline McManus, she says “Love it, love it, love it. Thank you so much for this and your English edition of El País. It helps me connect and understand better Spain. Just one thing – why run a music track under discussions? It is incredible distractive – distracting – and intrusive.” Now that’s an interesting one. Veronica our producer is of the tendency to put a little bit of music under our, under our podcast – under our ramblings – which I actually quite like. But I think it’s probably a cultural thing. If you actually sometimes see on the Spanish news, on news items they’ll put like, dramatic music under um, you know, images of news events or um, or even sad music if it’s a sad story, which kind of is a bit jarring I guess to, they don’t do that in Australia I would have thought. No, we certainly don’t do it in the UK. But um, I quite like having a bit of music under our uh, under our recordings. It sort of sets the mood, and if you, you know - drop in some dramatic music Veronica, and I can do my film trailer voice –

It was a time of war. IT was a time of heroes. It was a time of war and heroes.

That without any music would just sound a bit silly. Well – (laughs). It sounded a bit silly anyway. Alright next email. “Hi Simon my name is Ivanna Barbieri and I’ve just discovered your podcast. Great fun! My husband is the Spaniard and we live in Toronto, mainly, and in La Mancha summers. Great to hear about life on the ground, certainly the rise of Vox and the upcoming Spanish elections. How viable is Vox in the long term? Dividing the right seems to be working for Sánchez.” Well, we’ll definitely be coming to that in a second.

And then we’ve got this email from Rocio Ganzabal. “Hello Simon. As an English teacher and avid reader of El País in English I would like to congratulate you on your podcast. I work for the official school of languages in Pozuelo, and we listen to your podcast from time to time and use it as a listening class exercise. I was wondering, as many others, if you could publish the transcription of the podcast, and say ‘hi’ to my C1 class in one of your next episodes.” Of course we can. “Hi C1 class.” Now, as for the transcription, this has been an ongoing theme, obviously non-native speakers asking for the transcription because it’s probably quite hard to understand what we’re banging on about all of the time. Step in Ryan V, our hero from the USA. He writes “Hi Simon and Melissa - I've heard your listeners requesting an English transcript of the episodes so I've taken it upon myself to make one, starting with episode 12. If you are able to use it, let me know. I'd be happy to make one for future episodes.” Ryan, you are a hero. Now here we go. Some fun facts from Ryan:

One: You used approximately 3,900 words in 22 minutes, 11 seconds, meaning you spoke at a pace of approximately 177 words a minute. That's pretty fast!

Two: Simon spoke approximately 2,800 of the 3,900 words. That's 72% of the episode. About 3 percent was sound bites and Melissa was 25%. I'm sorry Melissa, I'm hogging the mic!

Melissa: look, I mean, I've said that it's about quality not quantity.

Simon: Are you saying I'm the quantity and you're the quality?

Number 3: The filler phrase "I mean" was used 27 times in the episode. That's interesting. I didn't really realize I had a filler phrase but obviously I do. My filler phrase would be "I mean." At least it's not the American "it's like" "and like" "and like" – If you ever hear – listen to an American talk the use of the word "like" does start to grate a little bit. But obviously my grating filler phrase is "I mean." And then Ryan writes "One last thing: I love the podcast, but as a campaigner for unbiased journalism, I have to say that your podcast fails the bias test." Well, thank you Ryan. Along the same lines Victoria Reesa says "As a student studying contemporary Spain I really appreciate this podcast not for the original reason I began listening which was for Spanish news that I couldn't read to be explained to me, but because Simon provides a more subjective narrative that the news doesn't normally provide. Looking forward to the next season." Uh, so, yes obviously I'm biased and subjective. I mean, I think the thing is, I don't think we want to just sort of be here reading out the news, do we? I don't think that that would be very interesting. We, you know, we- I've been doing this for thirteen years, I've been living in Spain for twenty years, so, you know, we've got a few opinions about Spain that we, you know, that we can get out there. I think it would be a bit dry if we just uh, if we didn't get into what we think about what's going on. That said, we will always try to present the actual news – Melissa's bit – in the most fair-handed way possible. So thank you all, to all of you for those letters. Also to Ramon Blocard, Richard Sherry, John Ryan, and of course our favorite Señora Wright who all got in touch. I haven't got time to read out your emails but I really do appreciate them. You can tweet me @simoninmadrid or you can use the hashtag #QuePodcast.

Right. So, let's move on. Melissa, we had an election.

Sound Bite: El Partido Socialista ha ganado las elecciones generales (cheers)

Simon: It was the third in four years. It was on Sunday. We're very tired (laughs). Can we as best as we can sum up what went down at the polls.

Melissa: Yes. Well, so as you said, this was the third time in less than four years that Spain has headed to the polls and opinion polls ahead of the election day had predicted the Socialist Party or "PSOE" would win the highest number of seats in congress, but even with these sort of figures floating about, there was a lot of uncertainty about what the final outcome would be, and the biggest wild card was the far-right party Vox. So, voter intention surveys had predicted they would win around 10% of the vote, but there was a lot of fear that this figure would be much higher. Amid this uncertainty, Spaniards poured into polling stations to cast their vote. From early on we were seeing the voter turnout figures come out and it was, you know, much higher than the previous election in 2016. Voter turnout this year in fact was 75%, which is 8.5 points more than in 2016, and the turnout was particularly notable in inland areas in Catalonia which are traditionally strong supporters of the independence movement. And so this kind of information was interpreted you know with very different perspectives, but as the vote was counted it was clear that this – the big winner of this year's election was the Socialist Party. They took 123 seats, which is 39 more than in 2016, and it is now the top political party in congress.

The big loser was the conservative Popular Party, or the “PP.” The PP suffered a crashing defeat, losing 71 seats, to be left with just 66.

Pablo Casado: Soy una persona que no eludo las responsabilidades. Los resultados si eran muy malos.

Melissa: The Center-right party Ciudadanos had better results winning 57 seats.

Sound Bite: Vamos a ser un oposicion, vamos a ser un oposicion leal a la constitucion. Un oposición leal a la economía-

Melissa: And Vox, you know we had such kind of grand hype and fears, they won 24 seats.

Sound Bite: Y les decimos a los de la derechita cobarde, que ya han empezado, atravez de sus voceros, a responsabilizar-

Melissa: Support for Vox at this year’s election was more than 50 times greater than that seen at the 2016 polls. But on the other hand because there had been so much hype, many of their supporters are disappointed that they didn’t perform better. But of course now the big question is where does that leave us now? Before the election, the left-wing alliance “Unidos Podemos” said they would support a Sánchez government but they only won 42 seats.

Sound Bite: Nos habría gustado un resultado mejor, pero es un resultado suficiente-

Melissa: So together they have Unidos Podemos and the Socialist Party have 165, which is 11 short of the 176 needed for an absolute majority. Now, sort of people thinking about where are they going to get these 11 votes needed to invest Sánchez as prime minister? One option is for Sánchez to make a deal with the same parties who supported his no confidence motion against former PM Mariano Rajoy. In other words with Catalan pro-independence parties and other regional parties. The Basque nationalist parties as well. So this could be one combination to swear Sánchez in as prime minister but it’s unlikely to form part of any government coalition. The second option, which is perhaps more likely, is for Sánchez to reach an agreement with Unidos Podemos, The Basque nationalist party, and three left-wing regional parties. In this case Sánchez would have 175 deputies, but would still need at least one abstention to be reinstated on the second vote, where only a simple majority is required. In other words, more “yes” votes than “no” votes.

Simon: But I think, yeah, after three elections in four years I think everyone just wants there to be stability, including um, including Brussels. Pablo Iglesias, the leader of Podemos, he kind of wants to get into government, he wants there to be a coalition government. He wants to have some ministries to call his own.

Pablo Iglesias: Si no hay un gobierno de coalicion, no hay gobierno estable. Porque el Partido Socialista tiene menos diputados que las tres derechas

Simon: He feels a bit like he was the person who came up with some popular policies while Sánchez was in government up until recently. So, for example, like the raising of the minimum wage – that was a Podemos proposal – but it was put into place by the Socialists so he feels like they took the credit, so that could be a sticking point. And then of course, if Sánchez has to rely on the votes of the pro-Catalan

parties again, we could just go back to exactly where we were at the beginning of the year, i.e. Sánchez getting bashed over the head by the opposition for doing pacts with what they describe as, you know, coup plotters and people who want to break up the unity of Spain. He was accused of having blood on his hands for talking to Bildu, which is a Basque Country party. You know, that's obviously a reference to a now-defunct ETA terrorist group so, you know, let's not forget why we got here in the first place. We got here in the first place because the Catalan nationalist parties withdrew their support from Sánchez for his, his budget plans because they wanted more concessions on the Catalan issue. They still want this referendum which Sánchez is not prepared to even consider. And Podemos is a bit more ambiguous on that issue. Podemos would like to see a referendum but is anti-Catalan independence so that could again complicate the issues.

To be honest I think, for us, it's not really a great surprise that Vox went in, it's a surprise that they didn't get as much support as we thought they might do. There was even opinion polls saying that they were gonna get um, they were gonna be the second most voted party, which that would've been pretty extraordinary. But as it is in the end, they got 10% of the vote, 24 seats, they're not going to have any influence on the formation of the government in the end, they're not going to be kingmaker like they were in the Andalusian regional elections and really, I mean, let's be honest, there's only three European countries left I think that don't have a far-right party in Parliament, so there's no huge surprise that Spain has ended up with one. You know, it as a party with a populist message, you know "Spaniards first" "Anti-immigration" I think really could we say that the surprise is that it's taken this long, you know, in a country that's been absolutely battered by an economic crisis. Is it not more surprising that it's taken this long for a, you know, a sort of populist far-right party to come along and Hoover up some the votes from people who are you know generally um, discontent with the state of politics, the state of the economy. But as one of our commentators here at the paper pointed out – there's five parties now. Everything has changed in this fragmented Spanish politics. But you know I think the real story to take away was the way that Casado, you know the Popular Party just got this absolute bashing at the polls. I mean, it's extraordinary. It's their worst result ever. He moved the party to the right. He swept away all of the centrist politicians and he went, he took the party to the right in response to Vox, in response to Ciudadanos, and it hasn't worked. It's been a disaster. And we had this just this hilarious appearance before the press yesterday of Casado and it was like you know the Groucho Marx quote "these are my principles and if you don't like them, (laughs) I've got others" because he came out and has just done this complete about turn and now he's calling Vox "ultra-derecha" the far right

Pablo Casado: En España solo hay un partido de centro-derecha que es el Partido Popular. Hay otro partido de extrema derecha que es Vox, y hay otro partido social-demócrata disfrazado de liberal desde hace un año y medio, pero fundacionalmente es social-demócrata y ha sido demostrado

Simon: He's accusing the Vox leaders Santiago Abascal of having kind of ridden the gravy train in the Madrid region, getting these big salaries from foundations in places that he was working. And you know, Casado's not really one to talk. He's a career politician who's never worked in a, in a proper job a day in his life. As far as I know he came up through the, he came up through the youth wing of the Popular Party so he's on kind of dangerous ground there, but he's gone straight back into campaign mode and he's moving back to the center ahead of the May 26th elections. He's saying he's not going to resign after the May 26th elections even if it turns out to be a disaster, and he's asking for time. He's pointed out that basically Mariano Rajoy took three elections before he became prime minister. It took him three elections to win. Whether the party is willing to give him enough time, it remains to be seen.

So much to talk about, so much to break down that we are, obviously as you can imagine we are pretty much focusing all of our efforts this week on covering the elections and covering the fallout from the elections so there's loads of stories to go and read if you want to go into more depth about what has been going on. Alright, well we'll wrap it up there. That was episode one of season two. My name is Simon Hunter.

Melissa: I'm Melissa Kitson.

Simon: Welcome back Melissa. It was great to be back. And welcome back Veronica, it's great to see you here again and we'll let you off on the fact that we're recording this a second time because you messed up the recording on Monday! But the recording on Monday was really, really scrappy so actually you've probably done us a favor. This was ¿Qué? 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 a practically empty *El País* newsroom compared to the madness of Sunday, and you can listen to it on your favorite podcast app. We'll be back next week with a brand new host of issues, all of them probably about the elections. So thank you very much for listening and adios.

Melissa: Ciao!