

¿Qué? Podcast, Season 2, Episode 5

Many thanks to listener Ryan V. for the transcript!

Simon: And this was “QuEee!?” – Oops sorry I’ll try that one again!

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 break down the nuts and bolts of the thorniest Spanish news stories. Whether you’re frying on the beaches of the Costas, taking refuge in the cool Iberian mountains, or outside of Spain and simply obsessed with all things Hispanic, we are here for you. “Estais en las mejores manos.” So sit back, relax, and let us break down all the Spanish stories that make you say “Do Spanish men really say 'hola' to complete strangers while standing at the urinal?” – Yes! Yes they do!

You wouldn’t know that Melissa but they do and it’s re- for British people that’s really weird! You don’t talk to people at the urinal. As usual I’m here with my colleague from the English Edition Melissa Kitson. Hello Melissa!

Melissa: Hello Simon!

Simon: How are you this week?

Melissa: I’m good!

Simon: Are you sad this week?

Melissa: I’m a bit sad, yes.

Simon: What happened?

Melissa: With the results...

Simon: Well, let’s not get into it.

Melissa: Yeah.

Simon: You’re a bit sad about the mayor of Madrid are you?

Melissa: Yeah. Good ol’ Manuela Carmena.

Simon: Everyone’s favorite grandma. Well, we shall come onto that in just a second. This is episode 5 of season 2 of our podcast. The weeks are flying by!

Melissa: I know!

Simon: It’s nearly June already, and what a year of news that we are having. Boring announcement: Please rate our podcast and leave a comment. Sorry about that but please do it ‘cause it’s great to get the word out there and share it on social media. Thank you to our listeners. We love our listeners. We,

in the main, just get positive feedback with a few notable exceptions but yes, please - it's been a bit quiet this week so please do email us at EnglishEdition@elpais.es or tweet me @simoninmadrid using the hashtag #quepodcast. You don't have to be writing in with anything in particular, just writing to say hello is lovely to know you're out there. Poor old – Now our star podcast listener Ryan V., the very kind man from the United States who's been doing our transcripts. We didn't hear from him this week. We didn't get a transcript so I hope you're ok Ryan. This isn't, you know-

Melissa: No pressure!

Simon: No recriminations or anything because you- it's an incredibly generous thing to do to spend your time transcribing our weekly ramblings but yeah we haven't heard from him. So we hope you're ok. I know that you said your kids have been sick so I hope all is good in the world of Ryan V.

I did however hear from Fritz in The Netherlands: "Dear Simon and Melissa – I love listening to all your "Que!?" podcasts. I'm following the Spanish news in the newspapers and it is not always easy to understand the way things go in Spain" – tell me about it – "but, your podcasts are adding a welcome extra background with a cheerful twist. Thanks for all that. Keep up the good work." Thank you very much Fritz.

And we also heard from a certain @rdelblanco which is, um, oh yes! That's my wife. She said "No os perdais el podcast "Que!?" De mi maridin @simoninmadrid que se queja en público de que su mujer no le deja hablar y aquí se desahoga. Me doy por aludida. #podcast @elpaisinenglish."

[Translation: "Don't miss out on the "QUE!?" podcast by my husband @simoninmadrid who complains in public that his wife doesn't let him speak and here he can let loose. I get the message."]

So, she's being clever. This was last week that I was talking about the fact that it's nice to be here and to be able to talk without being interrupted. Rosa has this amazing ability – when I'm taking an inhalation breath during an argument she can say four sentences in a split second.

Right, so, welcome to the new, fragmented world of Spanish politics. We have a lot to break down. We had a super Sunday. Three elections, or three classes of elections, on Sunday. Take it away Melissa. Do your best.

Melissa: I will try. Just a month after the general election in April, Spain returned to the polls this Sunday to vote for the European, municipal and regional elections, and just like in April, the clear winner was the Spanish Socialist Party of acting prime minister, Pedro Sánchez. The Socialists won the European elections with 33% of the vote, which is 10% more than what they received at the 2014 elections. The Socialists have gone from 13 to 20 seats in the European parliament, which can make it the biggest member of the S & D group since Spain joined the EU in 1986. Meanwhile, the right-wing Popular Party, which had until now had the highest number of MEPS of all Spanish parties, dropped from 16 to 12 seats. And the far-right group Vox entered the European chamber for the first time with 6% of the vote and 3 MEPS. The Socialist Party also made gains on a regional level, winning the highest percentage of the vote in 10 of Spain's 12 regions, including regions that had traditionally been strongholds of the PP, like Castilla y León, Murcia and La Rioja. But while the Socialists may have received the most votes, they are unlikely to be able to govern in all of these regions. Like in the general elections, the results have been very fractured, meaning the PP, Ciudadanos or "Citizens", and Vox have combined forces to form regional governments, like they did in Andalucía in December of last year.

In Madrid's region, for instance, the Socialist Party won the highest percentage of votes for the first time since 1987, which is when I was born [laughs]. But even though it has 37 seats and the support of other left-wing groups, it does not have enough to defeat the right-wing bloc. Now, just how many regions the Socialists will govern will depend on what deals they can reach with left-wing parties like Podemos, and whether they can convince Ciudadanos to switch sides and vote for them instead of the Popular Party and Vox. But the real, you know – the big story from Sunday's election was not about the Socialist Party's gains, but about the loss of the jewel in the crown – Madrid City Hall, which had been governed by former judge Manuela Carmena of the left-wing party "Más Madrid."

Manuela Carmena won the highest percentage of the vote at the local elections, but in the end was defeated by the right-wing bloc. This means that José Luis Martínez Almeida from the PP is set to be the next mayor of Madrid, even though the PP saw its worst result in its history.

The loss of Madrid City Hall is a big blow to the left, especially to Podemos, which fared terribly at basically all classes of the election on Sunday. Manuela Carmena has since resigned from Madrid City Hall and many of her pioneering programs, particularly "Madrid Central," which sought to reduce air pollution, now hang in the balance.

Simon: A little tear is rolling down, down Melissa's face.

Melissa: Cue the sad music.

Simon: Poor ol' Manuela Carmena. Yeah, so, the jewel-two jewels in the crown really are not just the City Hall but also the region. The Madrid region looks set to stay in the hands of the Popular Party. The Socialist Party was very hopeful that it would be able to get a foothold there. The region's been run by the PP for a very long time, as had Madrid City Hall before Manuela Carmena came along. So we've got this pretty extraordinary situation going on. It's just completely changed everything, because some parties have gone back up like the PP has kind of recovered some of the ground that it lost. You know, Pablo Casado looked positively euphoric on Sunday night.

Pablo Casado (translated): The Popular Party has now started their comeback! We're back!

Simon: Compared to the, you know, disaster that was the April 28th general elections. It's further strengthened the Socialist Party obviously. It's meant another hammering for Podemos which fared badly at the April 28th elections and fared equally badly here.

Sound Bite (translated): the election results were bad. We're not at all happy, but I also want to say that we're not giving up.

Simon: And really what we've seen is the sort of scenario that the left was really fearful of which is, you know, the same scenario that we saw in the Andalucía regional elections before Christmas, which is um, the PP, Ciudadanos and Vox (the far-right Vox) set to do deals and form governments, which means obviously, for their support Vox will want something in return. So really now it's a question of what it is they're going to demand and what it is they're going to achieve.

There's 12 regional governments up for grabs at the moment and 8 of them Socialist Party won the elections but obviously it needs to do deals. Now, let's look at each party. So what, I mean, what happened with Podemos? Voters have maybe gone back to the Socialist Party? The likelihood of Pablo

Iglesias managing to get a coalition government in the national government seems to be rapidly fading. Even the chance of him getting ministries for his party.

Sound bite (translated): Everyone has to reconsider our strategy after what happened this past 26th of May. Everyone. Everyone. The important thing is stability.

Simon: The Popular Party always does something fairly amusing in this situation. If you go back and look at news footage from the past, when they win the most votes at an election but fall short of a majority, they start banging on about how “oh, the party that won the most votes should govern. The party that won the most votes should govern” and you can find so many examples of them saying that. Pablo Casado, Esperanza Aguirre – a historical figure, a veteran figure from the party – but, oh my goodness! How quickly they change their tune when the boot is on the other foot. So now it's all about, oh we're going to do deals and, you know, they were celebrating basically taking Madrid City Hall and Madrid regional government on Sunday night even though we've got a long way to go. Unbelievably, the PP looks likely to form a regional government by the gaffe-prone candidate Isabel Diaz. So she's the woman who was saying how great traffic jams are in Madrid and going out on a Saturday wouldn't be the same if you weren't stuck in a traffic jam in Madrid and other such bizarre things. And then it looks like José Luis Martínez Almeida, another relative newcomer is going to be the new mayor of Madrid. I mean, they were bashing – in that City Hall race – they were bashing Carlamena for the Madrid Central, traffic calming measures. Also, street cleaning and the state of the city overall. Vox was claiming, you know, that Madrid was so unsafe that you could just pop down to the shops and come back and someone's occupied- squatters have occupied your, your apartment which is a little bit of an exaggeration of the real situation. Ciudadanos was hoping that they were gonna do really well on Sunday and that would let their leader Albert Rivera basically become the de facto leader of the opposition instead of the Popular Party's Pablo Casado but that has not happened and all of a sudden Rivera has been saying “Con Sánchez no, con Sánchez no” like, no deals with the Socialists seems to be open to doing some deals.

Sound bite (translated): “we'll see if some place there's someone who will repute Sánchez's politics, who will repute the pacts with separatists and populists. If there is someone -and right now we don't see anyone – but if there is someone somewhere then we could talk.”

Simon: Now that could be really interesting because, as it stood he was completely ruling out saying “no no no no, we're not doing any deals with the Socialists” but yet, seems ok doing deals with Vox.

Sound Bite (translated): Sometime , perhaps we'll come to a deal like what happened in Andalucía with the pact with the Popular Party. Vox will have to decide if they support this agreement or don't support this agreement.

Simon: Which is causing some criticism from within his own party. In Barcelona we had the former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls running as a candidate and he's actually threatening to pull his support for the party if it does deals with Vox.

As for Vox, (sound effects) – we haven't done that for a while have we? - what effect will Vox have? Well, they immediately said “that they weren't gonna - the last-that's the first day of the end of Madrid Central! Determined to shut down Madrid Central.

Sound Bite (translated): “As of tomorrow, Madrid Central is finished!”

Simon: Realistically, I don't think that's gonna happen. What's probably more likely to happen is it will go back to the way it was under the Popular Party which wasn't massively different. I mean, really what Carmena has done is what the Popular Party was already doing but just sort of on a much larger scale and is probably closed down big streets such as the Gran Vía to through traffic which is probably what the PP will go back and do but it seems a crying shame doesn't it? You've got a system which is already seen traffic go down by 24% in parts of the center. Pollution down by 38%. And we've said in the past you know, it's insane that in Madrid you can still drive down the Gran Vía. You know, there's probably no other major European city where you can just freely enter such a central part of a city that's very polluted. Vox also said that they wanted to move the Gay Pride party out of the center and stick it in the Casa del Campo park.

Sound Bite (translated): “Yes, we maintain changing the location of the pride festival to- taking it out of Madrid because it causes real problems and traffic jams- we would send it-

“Where would you move it?”

“We would move it-if you'll allow me- because it would allow for them to really hold the gay festival all they want but within Casa de Campo. “

Simon: I don't think that's going to happen either. The PP are already saying no, we're not going to move that anywhere so that seemed like a bit of an empty campaign promise from Vox. But yeah, let's see what happens. Let's see how these negotiations go along and what ends up- what is Vox gonna get?

And now, we haven't mentioned Catalonia. The former Catalan premier Carlos Puigdemont who fled Spain to avoid arrest, to avoid trial for his role in the 2017 independence drive, he won a seat in the European elections. I like your pronunciation of the acronym MEP - were you saying “MEP?”

Melissa: “MEP”

Simon: Yes! I quite like that. Normally we say “M-E-P” but I'm going to start- we're going to start a new trend and say “MEP.” These new politicians, they're on the “MEP.”

Melissa: (groans)

Simon: That's a New Zealand accent joke there. Well Carlos Puigd- again, the Catalan pro-independence leaders, they've played another blinder, but can he be sworn in? He technically would have to come back to Spain to be sworn in. If he does come back to Spain he's going to be arrested and put on trial. Oriol Junqueras, is, you know, he just can't stop himself. He's a serial parliamentarian. He's just been sworn in and then immediately suspended last week as a deputy in Spain's Congress, in the lower house. So what's going to happen with Junqueras? And then also in Barcelona, Ada Colau who was the former campaigner turned mayor, she looks set to lose her role as the mayor. Now we could end up for the first time ever with a pro-independence mayor in the Catalan capital so that could be very interesting. Really it was a sort of, you know, a general trend of setbacks for the so-called “politicians del cambio” and this is referring to Podemos, Ada Colau, and these are really politicians who entered the political system in Spain in the wake of the-

Melissa: Indignados

Simon: Yeah, the indignados movement, which is when this massive citizen protest just suddenly sparked off in Spain. Protestors occupied Sol Square. It actually – not a lot of people seem to remember this but it actually spawned the Occupy Wall Street movement, it was one of the inspirations behind Occupy Wall Street.

And all of a sudden, you know, these new parties were formed. A very diverse group of people ended up in Spain's institutions, but this seems to have been a bit of the backlash. I think the only mayor who managed from that kind of group or political stripe who managed to stay on as mayor is the mayor of Cadiz I think. I think his name is Kichi is his nickname. So yeah, quite a setback for those parties. And now, it's all to play for, considering as we always say, Spain was this two party system for so long. We've got a lot of deals to do, a lot of negotiations, otherwise we could just end up in this constant state of gridlock and constantly going back to the polls.

Alright so we should wrap it up there. My name is Simon Hunter.

Melissa: I'm Melissa Kitson.

Simon: And this was “QUEEEE!?” - there we go. That was a super big one to make up for that slightly weak one – 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, which is fortunately a pollen-free zone, and you can listen to it on your favorite podcast app. You can also request it via Alexa, Siri or you Google Assistant. We'll be back next week with a brand new host of issues. Adios!

Melissa: Ciao!