

# Progressive Politics in the Age of Polarization and Economic Crisis

## Current Situation and Prospects of the Spanish PSOE

CARMEN DE PAZ NIEVES / GUILLERMO MORENO RODRIGUEZ

SPANISH SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY (PARTIDO SOCIALISTA OBRERO ESPAÑOL, PSOE)	
Official website:	www.psoe.es
Secretary General:	José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero
Founded:	May 2, 1879 by Pablo Iglesias
SI and PES Membership:	SI: since 1951; PES: since 1974
Party membership:	2008: 592,405 (224,883 activists/fee-payers and 367,572 sympathizers)
Electoral resonance parliamentary elections:	2008: 43.87 % of the votes (48.29 % of seats), in government  2004: 43.3 % of the votes (46.85 % of seats), in government  2000: 34.1 % of the votes (35.7 % of seats), in opposition
Electoral resonance European elections:	2009: PSOE 21 seats (38.51 %), PP 23 seats (43.23 %)  2004: PSOE 25 seats (43.46 %), PP 24 seats (41.21 %)  1999: PSOE 24 seats (35.33 %), PP 27 seats (39.74 %)
Government participation:	Since 2008: in government; head of government: José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero  2004–2008: in government; head of government: José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero  2000–2004: in opposition

## Historical Overview

Founded in 1879 by Pablo Iglesias, the historic leader of the workers' movement in Spain, it was not until 1910 that the party first managed to achieve representation in the Spanish Parliament. During the second Republic, the party was part of the government between 1931 and 1933, and also as part of the Popular Front in 1936 and until defeat in the Civil War.

During the Civil War, the PSOE split into three streams: the revolutionary Marxist section, led by Francisco Largo Caballero, the more moderate and social democratic faction, headed by Indalecio Prieto, and the reformist group, led by Julián Besteiro. Immediately after the war was over, Franco declared the PSOE illegal, and its members were forced into exile or went underground, until 1977, when the party was again legalized. During the 40 dictatorship years a large number of party activists were persecuted, imprisoned, and even executed.

Felipe González was elected Secretary General of the Party at the XXVI Congress, which took place in Suresnes in 1974 and represented a turning point in the Party's evolution from its initial Marxist ideology to a more social democratic position. In fact, González gave up his position in 1979 due to the internal resistance to the shift away from more radical positions, but was re-elected by an extraordinary Congress. González headed the shift in the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) to a »catch-all party.« The previous strategy of mass mobilization and radical rhetoric was abandoned, and the party turned into the social democratic multi-class organization it is today (Encarnación 2008). This successful shift, together with the particular Spanish circumstances, allowed the PSOE to become the hegemonic political force in Spain for 14 years, from 1982 to 1996.

Since the beginning of the transition period in 1977 there have been 10 general elections in Spain, and three different governments (see Annex, Tables 2 and 3). In the first two elections and until 1982 the party in power was the centrist UCD, led by Adolfo Suárez. The party's initial success in 1977 and 1979 was as rapid as its fall in 1982, when a large share of its vote transferred to the »reformed« PSOE. The 1982 elections were the first and last in which a Spanish political party received such a large percentage of the vote and broad parliamentary representation. In 1986, the PSOE restored its absolute majority, despite the emergence of IU (Izquierda Unida) as a viable political force to the left of the PSOE.

Although the PSOE won again in the 1989 and 1993 elections, it lost its absolute majority, being forced to negotiate with the nationalist

parties CiU and PNV, and progressively losing popular support. In the 1996 general elections, the conservative Partido Popular (PP), led by José María Aznar, won the elections for the first time in the democratic history of Spain.

From that time until the 2004 elections, the PSOE went through a transformation process, marked by the 2000 defeat under the leadership of Joaquín Almunia. In that election, the PP gained an absolute majority. In the same year, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was elected new Secretary General and a process of renovation, led by the so-called »New Way,« was initiated, which accounted for the successes of 2004. In the 2008 elections the PSOE recovered its mandate.

Regarding the EU parliamentary elections (see Annex, Table 4), the PSOE comfortably won the first two, in 1987 and 1989, losing for the first time against the PP in 1994, in the elections leading to the PP's first national mandate. The PP won again in 1999, with three more seats, while in 2004 the PSOE won by a narrow majority. In the last European elections, the PP obtained, again, a slightly better result than the PSOE.

## **Current Situation of the Party**

### **Voter Approval**

After the PSOE's victory in the 2008 general elections, the polls started to show the impact of the serious economic crisis on the Party's popular support. The PP has been ahead in the polls since June 2009, registering a 10 point lead very recently, according to various unofficial surveys, due to the introduction of measures to cut the public deficit that the government announced last May. However, this difference does not seem credible and is likely to be due to the exceptional circumstances.

Concerning the gender segmentation of the socialist vote, the last Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) polls (E 2834, April 2010) show that, according to direct voting intentions, the PSOE would gain the largest number of women's votes. On the other hand, according to this poll the PSOE has its biggest lead over the PP in the 45–54 year old age group (5.1 percent gap) and in the 55–64 year old age group (6.7 percent).

## Public Perception

Looking at José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's personal qualities, during the 2004 election campaign the attribute most frequently highlighted was his »talante,« his capacity for dialogue. During the six years in which he has headed the government, this quality has been highly valued by the public in opinion polls.

In recent months, and taking advantage of the crisis, the PP has attacked the President constantly, portraying him as an inefficient manager. The CIS polls show how the economic situation and the relentless attacks by the PP are undermining public perceptions of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero as a safe pair of hands. Between January 2009 and January 2010 the share of citizens who considered that he was more competent than Mariano Rajoy, the PP leader, decreased from 43 percent to 33 percent. However, in January only 29 percent of the sample considered that Rajoy was more competent. More generally, and despite this change, Zapatero continues to inspire more confidence and is regularly valued more highly than Rajoy as a political leader. On the other hand, the Spanish population continues to associate the left with ideas such as equality, individual freedom, and progress, although efficiency is more generally associated with the right.

## Party Platform

During Zapatero's first term of office (2004–2008), the socialist policy agenda focused on: (i) widening and consolidating civil rights, through the promotion of gender equality, the law that allowed homosexual marriage, and the Law of Historical Memory, which recognized certain rights of victims of the War and dictatorship; (ii) consensus building in his political actions, which generated the expression »el talante de Zapatero,« and which translated into a continued dialogue among and with all social and regional actors; (iii) the realignment of Spain's foreign policy with EU positions; (iv) the development of the fourth pillar of the welfare state, through the Law on Dependency, which provides support for dependent people; and (v) the reinforcement of a »plural« Spain, mostly through the negotiation and reform of most »autonomy statutes,« the special laws that establish specific regional competencies.

During the second term of office, the agenda has focused mainly on combating the economic crisis and the development of a new long-term

economic paradigm. In a first phase, the government concentrated on mitigating the most immediate and negative effects of the crisis through an ambitious fiscal stimulus package and the strengthening of social protection for the most vulnerable. The government is also focusing on the introduction of the necessary measures to lay the foundations of a new economic model. Among the initiatives undertaken in this regard, the most important has been the Law and Strategy for a Sustainable Economy.

At the same time, the government and the Party continue to promote the expansion of citizens' rights, with initiatives such as the new Law on Equality of Treatment, the Law that widens the guarantees related to abortion and the Law on Religious Freedom.

In addition, and through the Presidency of the EU that Spain held between January and June 2010, the Socialist government has promoted a policy agenda at the EU level that focuses on equality and innovation; has started the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty successfully; and has supported measures leading to a strengthening of the economic governance of the Union, which is finally close to becoming a reality after a period of stagnation in the integration process.

Finally, the PSOE recently established a new think tank, IDEAS, which encompasses other socialist foundations, with the objective of generating and stimulating new progressive political thinking and ideas for policy-making in the long term, to feed into the political debate and discourse, and establishing new international and national alliances with other progressive actors.

## Active Party Life and State of the Party

The history and importance of the Party in the current political system makes of the PSOE one of the main, if not the main, political party in Spain. Currently, the PSOE has 592,405 members, divided into »militantes« (224,833), who pay a monthly fee, and »simpatizantes« (367,572), who do not pay anything but identify with the party. There has been a clear trend in recent years of a fall in the number of »militantes« and a rise in the number of »simpatizantes.« As for the youth branch of the Party, currently there are around 14,600 »militantes« and 10,000 »simpatizantes.«

## Performance Record as Government or Opposition Party

As already mentioned, the government's approval ratings have deteriorated since the crisis started. Since April 2008 a decrease in approval ratings has been registered, falling from around 50 percent in the first semester of 2008 to 33.3 percent in April 2010. However, the PP has not directly benefited from this decrease, since Spanish voters continued to rate the government's performance above the PP's in opposition (CIS E 2834, April 2010).

Today, the main issue on the agenda is the economic crisis. People's concerns are clear from the official polls: 63.3 percent of the sample consider unemployment the key problem in Spain, followed by 19.1 percent who mentioned economic issues as their main concern. Corruption is also high on the list, due to the serious cases affecting the PP in recent months (particularly the so-called »Gürtel« case, which relates to the Party's financing).

## Development Possibilities

Despite the unprecedented crisis situation in Spain, the main opposition party has not managed to gather significant popular support. The main reasons behind this include the PP corruption scandals, its lack of credibility and alternatives and, especially, the party's leadership problems, since Mariano Rajoy is among the lowest rated leaders, even among the conservative electorate.

The third national party, IU, a coalition of parties to the left of the PSOE, remains far below the PP and the PSOE, and today has only two seats in Parliament. Although the party's electoral expectations have improved with the current situation, its growth possibilities are constrained by the Spanish electoral system, which does not favor small national parties.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, it is necessary to highlight the recent emergence of a new political party, UPyD, founded around the ex-socialist leader Rosa Díez, which aims to occupy the center of the political spectrum. As a consequence of stark political polarization and the discrediting of the

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1. Spain's electoral system is one of proportional representation. However, the system overrepresents the smaller constituencies (since all provinces and the cities of Ceuta and Melilla receive at least two seats) and, in practice, favors the two large parties and parties with regional roots. For further reading, see Hopkin (2005) and Márquez and Ramírez (1998).

majority parties, analysts consider it highly probable that this party will consolidate to become a fourth political force in the next elections.

## Opening Up to Society and Strategic Partnerships

The strengthening of relations with various civil society groups has been one of the major successes of the PSOE. Even in the current situation, the government has managed to maintain social peace and stability. Relations with the trade unions have generally been very positive, especially with UGT (which was originally linked to the Party). Regarding business associations, and despite their traditional proximity to conservative parties and differences concerning topics such as labor market reform, relations have not tended to be confrontational. On the other hand, the concern and initiatives adopted by the PSOE to fight against climate change and poverty, and for gender equality and civil rights, has led to good relations between the PSOE and most civil society organizations and activist groups.

## European Policy and Global Challenges

Promotion of the continuing construction of the EU edifice is a core objective of the PSOE's international agenda. This is due partly to historical reasons, since the EU played a key role in Spain's democratization and modernization after the dictatorship.

Today, the PSOE maintains its unconditional support for the Lisbon Strategy and Treaty and for the process of enlargement, as well as a commitment to continue to strengthen the European Union in its development towards a real economically and politically unified space. In this sense, the Socialist Party considers that the EU should play a key role in the fight against the current economic crisis and in advancing a new, more productive and sustainable European economic and social model.

At the same time, and in global terms, the PSOE promotes the establishment of new financial market rules that guarantee greater transparency and control over market activities, and an international convergence with regard to norms to ensure the stability of the financial system and thus of the real economy. Globalization is regarded by the PSOE as a positive process with considerable potential to improve prosperity, although it will only be fair and politically desirable if it incorporates criteria of equity and social justice.

## From »Quiet Opposition« to Progressive Governance

After 14 years in government, the PSOE was defeated in the general election of 1996, when the first right-wing government in Spain's democratic history came into office. This defeat, together with the one in 2000 which gave the PP an absolute majority, led the Party into a period of internal renovation and the redefinition of its ideological positions. After the 2000 Congress the »New Way,« led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, took control of the Party.

While in opposition, until 2004, Rodríguez Zapatero unfolded a non-confrontational strategy that has been dubbed »quiet opposition«, within the framework of which, in areas such as the fight against terrorism, economic policy, and judicial reform, the PSOE found it necessary to reach a consensus with the PP. At the same time, Zapatero made it clear that there were other areas, such as education and foreign affairs, in which the two parties' stances are very different. Zapatero's consensual style thus became more aggressive when the government sought to reform the education system, and especially when Aznar decided to support the Iraq war. In addition, Zapatero was particularly critical of Aznar's authoritarian governing style (Méndez Lago 2006).

In order to win the election in 2004 the PSOE tried to attract a new constituency, voters on the left, and to mobilize the significant share of the electorate that had positioned themselves to the left of center on the ideological spectrum, but had abstained or voted for the PP in 2000 (Campmany 2005: 215). In fact, various analyses of the 2004 elections show that the three million new socialist votes in 2004 actually came from previous non-voters and new voters, as well as transfers from the PP and IU (Michavila 2005). Although the exact role played by the 11-M terrorist attacks in Madrid remains unclear, there seems to be a certain agreement among specialists that the management of this crisis by the PP added to the growing discomfort of the majority of the population who did not support the Iraq war (around eight million people demonstrated in different Spanish cities to ask the PP government to withdraw from Iraq). Evidence suggests that both aspects played a determining role in the significant mobilization of left-wing voters and in the demobilization of the right-wing vote in 2004, although previous observable trends among the electorate, as reflected in public opinion polls, already showed a significant increase in the support for the PSOE (Bosco/Sánchez-Cuenca 2009).



Mariano Rajoy's PP, however, found in these events an argument for considering the election results illegitimate, and developed an opposition style which has been termed »crispación« (»tension« or »hostility«) which it has pursued during the whole period the PSOE has been in office. This style basically consists not only of refusing to reach any kind of agreement with the government, but also of seeking direct confrontation and creating radical divisions by »negative campaigning,« based on giving offence and hurling insults, in relation to topics that divert attention from ideological issues (Bosco/Sánchez Cuenca 2009).

This strategy is not new. Since Aznar became the party leader, the PP has made continuous efforts to focus the political debate on three issues that are not ideological: terrorism and the fight against ETA; nationalism and devolution; and corruption. This, according to some scholars, corresponds to the PP's objective of undermining the advantage that the socialists have traditionally enjoyed as a consequence of their ideological proximity to the majority of the electorate, which tends to be to the left of the ideological spectrum (Ontiveros et al. 2008, Bosco/Sánchez-Cuenca 2009). This strategy, which the Secretary of Communication of the PP made explicit in an interview published by the Financial Times shortly before the 2008 elections,<sup>2</sup> generated, according to a recent study the significant retrenchment registered in the centrist socialist vote in the 2004 elections (Estefanía et al. 2008).

Despite the PP's successful efforts to divert the public debate towards non-ideological issues, the clear focus and remarkable achievements of the PSOE's ideologically left-wing policies, particularly those related to the equality and civil rights agenda, and the reinforcement of its links with its traditional partners, the unions, within the framework of Zapatero's »consensual« style, as well as with its core voters, the workers, were decisive in the 2008 victory. Moreover, the deliberate attacks and »crispación« tactics of the PP seemed to rebound, mobilizing a significant share of left-wing voters against the PP in 2008 (rather than in favor of the PSOE).

Recent evidence suggests, in other words, that a large percentage of Spanish voters behaved strategically in the 2008 election. In fact, the loss of votes by the third main political party in Spain, IU – from 2,640,000 votes, or around 10 percent of the total in 1996 to 970,000 votes and only

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2. »Our whole strategy is directed towards the floating socialist voter. We know that they will never vote for us, but if we can sow sufficient seeds of doubt in their minds about the economy, immigration, and the nationalist question then maybe they will stay at home.«

two seats in Parliament in the 2008 elections – is partly associated with the strategic behavior of regular IU voters who did not want to see the PP elected (Viñuela and Artes 2009, Bosco/Sánchez-Cuenca 2009). Around 20.4 percent of IU voters in 2004 changed their vote to the PSOE in 2008. Even more striking due to its unprecedented nature was the transfer of the nationalist vote to the PSOE, probably in response to similar considerations. Around 13 percent of CiU and 11 percent of ERC voters in 2004 voted for the PSOE in 2008 (Bosco/Sánchez-Cuenca 2009). Two quantitative studies confirm these shifts statistically, alongside the centrist vote transfer to the PP (Urquizu 2008, Torcal/Lago 2008).

In view of the previous analysis, a number of factors seem to explain the prevalence of social democracy in Spain, in comparison to other European countries, where these political forces are clearly in decline. First – and in line with the »narrowing« and »dominance of the public discourse« theses<sup>3</sup> – the PSOE is perceived in Spain as the only center-left political force in the ideological spectrum, in the context of an increasingly polarized public debate. This growing polarization is in turn explained by a conscious strategy on the part of the PSOE and the PP, and has been a key driver of the vote in the past two electoral processes.

This polarization is evident in the strong ideological association of certain values with »being or voting right-wing« and »left-wing,« which is represented in the following table. Equality, solidarity, human rights, freedom, progress, idealism, and tolerance are widely linked with the left by poll respondents in one of the latest CIS exercises, whereas tradition and order are qualities or values associated with »being right-wing.«

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3. »*Narrowing*« thesis: In the party spectrum, social democratic parties' room to maneuver has narrowed with regard to policy, whether because conservative parties have become »soft« and now occupy the center ground or because populist parties are attracting the votes of disaffected population groups. In countries in which both trends arise, social democratic parties are »sandwiched.« »*Dominance of public discourse*« thesis: Social democratic parties have ceased to dominate the public discourse with regard to the key social topics. Public opinion represents a kind of center-liberal mainstream. Progressive left-wing policy approaches, in contrast, cannot in most cases command a majority in society. In recent years, the level of competence attributed to social democratic parties has experienced a clear downward trend. Any notion that they are more competent in comparison to other parties has all but disappeared.

Table 1:  
Values Associated with Right- or Left-wing Parties (%)

	<i>Right-wing</i>	<i>Left-wing</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>None</i>
Equality	9.2	45.0	18.0	10.3
Honesty/propriety	14.7	25.1	21.8	23.2
Human rights	10.2	38.1	26.8	8.4
Tradition	53.7	10.7	13.1	4.5
Freedom	14.9	39.6	19.3	6.5
Progress	20.3	33.7	20.8	8.7
Order	43.5	13.8	18.2	8.4
Solidarity	10.7	43.9	22.0	8.2
Idealism	17.4	36.1	18.9	7.5
Tolerance	11.00	44.9	18.9	8.5
Efficiency	25.6	20.7	16.9	18.9

Source: *January 2010, CIS survey.*

During the transition and almost until the change of government in 1996, the priority in Spain was the consolidation of democracy, social peace, and national modernization, over any political consideration that could lead the country into confrontation or division. Three informal institutions were put in place to ensure and facilitate this process: the Pact of Silence, which entailed avoiding any public debate on reparations for the victims of the Dictatorship; the search for »super-majorities« or qualified majorities on issues of state; and the primacy of centripetal rather than centrifugal alliances. The three institutions have progressively unraveled, however, giving rise – among other factors – to the high degree of political polarization that Spain exhibits today, in both historical and comparative terms (Dalton 2008, Field 2005, Field 2008).

A similar polarization occurred in a majority of European countries between the 1970s and the 1980s, while in the 1990s the consolidation of the welfare state and the prevalence of the Third Way narrowed the gap between conservative and progressive political forces in these countries. Developments in Spain have been completely different.

Second, it is necessary to consider that a majority of the electorate in Spain leans towards the left, where IU and the PSOE are the only realistic

options (Ontiveros et al. 2008). The Spanish median voter position, according to most analyses, has traditionally been located towards the center-left of the left-right ideological spectrum (Ontiveros et al. 2008). Figure 1, based on the annual polls conducted by the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS), represents the evolution of the self-positioning of voters between 1978 and 2006. As the figure shows, the median voter position has progressively turned more centrist: while in the early 1980s it was located towards the center-left (3–5), in 1986 and 2000 it moved towards the center (4–6).

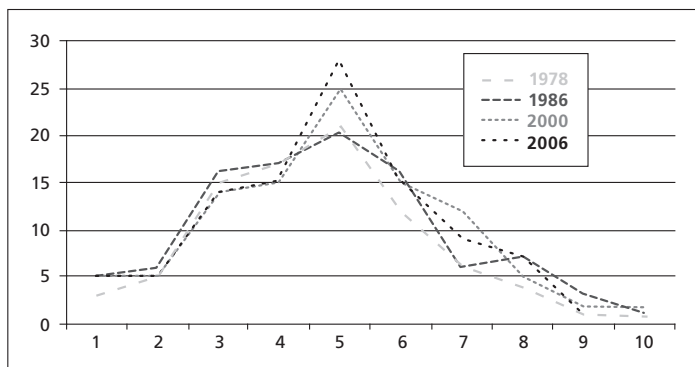
In this sense, the proportional electoral system functions in practice as a majoritarian one and thus favors the prevalence of the two main parties, PP and PSOE. The emergence of another leftist political force with potentially national appeal could threaten the PSOE's pre-eminence, but this does not seem feasible at the present time. This is not the case in other European countries, however, where social democratic forces have experienced the emergence of other leftist parties that have taken the lead in matters such as environmental policy, which in Spain is part of the PSOE agenda.

Third, from the perspective of the »Dahrendorf« and »alienation« theses,<sup>4</sup> the PSOE has managed, through its recent policy and Zapatero's consensual style, to keep alive the alliances and ties with social groups that have traditionally supported the party. At the same time, the party has worked intensively to build new alliances with sectors and social movements whose aspirations are only likely to find accommodation in the socialist agenda, such as women, homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals, or immigrants, as well as many NGOs. This has not been the case in many other European countries, where the social democratic discourse and policies on civil rights have not, in recent years, been as strong and consistent as formerly.

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4. »Dahrendorf« thesis: With the end of the industrial age social democracy has fulfilled its purpose and therefore has become superfluous. The electoral base of the (oppressed) industrial workforce no longer exists. The political promise of social advancement has either been fulfilled or is no longer regarded as realistic (»life should be better for our children«). »Alienation« thesis: The social democratic parties have become alienated from their original base among the workers. Exclusive links with trade unions or social movements no longer exist or have been broken in recent years. What social democratic parties have to offer no longer corresponds to the needs and aspirations of the workers, who increasingly see no prospect of personal advancement.

Figure 1:  
The Evolution of the Median Voter in Spain



Source: Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) annual survey.

## Future Prospects

The situation today is not favorable to the PSOE, due to a combination of the following factors, among others:

1. The long and damaging economic crisis and the public perception that it is ultimately the middle class and the most vulnerable who are paying the price in Europe, given that it is conservative-driven measures that have prevailed in the second phase of the response.
2. The tireless and immoderate PR campaign conducted by the main opposition party, the conservative PP, within the framework of its »crispación« strategy, aimed at discouraging the socialist vote rather than appealing to its own electorate with an alternative and constructive agenda and debate.
3. The lack of support for the government from other political forces in Parliament and from most of the media, for various reasons, including the establishment of a coalition government in the Basque country with the PP which left out the nationalist party PNV, as well as the measures introduced by the government to increase competition in the media and communications sector.

However, despite the difficult situation, the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero has remained cohesive and committed to the original

socialist agenda. On the one hand, the government is determined to continue to develop the expansion of civil rights that is turning Spain into one of the most progressive countries in Europe. In the first semester of 2010 a law improving guarantees related to abortion, a law on religious freedom, and a law on equality of treatment are being discussed and processed. In addition, the most vulnerable – including the unemployed and the dependent – continue to be at the top of the government's priorities, despite the current financial constraints.

On the other hand, and as part of the second main pillar of its agenda, the government will introduce some structural reforms aimed at laying the foundations of a new sustainable economy, including reform of the labor market, restructuring of the banking sector and pension system reform. The IDEAS Foundation has prepared a report on the new sustainable economy, which analyzes the current situation and trends in Spain, and the necessary reforms in the medium and long term, with a view to transforming the Spanish model of production by 2025, taking into account a threefold objective: economic, social, and environmental sustainability. This report highlights the fact that, if the right economic sectors are promoted through the reforms proposed over the next 15 years, employment in Spain could grow by 20 percent and Spanish income per capita by 40 percent, while income inequality could decrease by 30 percent and contaminating emissions by 20 percent, relative to a scenario in which no reforms are implemented (IDEAS 2009).

The current political atmosphere seems to be generating a generalized public disaffection with politics, which might lead to an increase in abstention rates in coming elections. Analyses based on current data also suggest that minority parties, such as the new centrist UPyD and the leftist IU, might particularly benefit from the current situation. However, the circumstances and high degree of uncertainty require caution in the evaluation and forecasting of political developments over the next two years, when local and regional elections will take place. It is clear that the events of these two years will, in any case, be crucial to the outcome of the general election in 2012, which today, considering the rapid pace of change in the political arena, remains unpredictable.

## European Perspective

The most recent election results in some countries seem to confirm the relative decline of social democratic parties in Europe. Only four European countries are ruled by social democrats today, and in the last European elections social democratic parties gained wider representation than right-wing ones in only six out of the EU27. In line with these results, the last national elections in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and the UK yielded the worst results – in historical terms – in recent decades for the Dutch and British Labour parties, the German SPD, and the French Socialist party. In this context, the debate about the current situation of social democracy in Europe has become central. Are we witnessing the end or the renewal of one of the major ideologies of twentieth-century Europe?

It is evident that circumstances today are different from those of the 1970s and 1980s. Growing globalization, the institutionalization of the welfare state, the consolidation of free markets as the main pillar of our economic model, the general rise in average income levels, increasing social heterogeneity »in no particular direction,« and the progressive political fragmentation are only some of the trends that might explain the lack of adjustment of some social democratic platforms, agendas, and alliances to the new concerns and aspirations of European publics.

Some of the responses to these challenges emerging within the different forums aimed at the »renewal of social democratic thinking and policies« include:

- ▶ Defining an economic model that could become a real alternative to the conservative/liberal paradigm, and which could also be applied in times of crisis. This model should be based on equity, efficiency, and sustainability, and would involve the redefinition of the roles of the financial sector vis-à-vis technology and industry, and of the public sector in general with regard to increased quality and efficiency of services. The energy model must also be recast.
- ▶ Defining a program and a clear roadmap to instill confidence in the electorate in hard times. Progressive movements are associated with change and thus, in some cases, with instability and insecurity. Mobility and positive change will continue to be the identifying signatures of social democracy, but in tandem with economic, legal, and social security.
- ▶ Actively contributing to the organization of civil society, the representation of new social groups and the generation of new social habits.

- ▶ Identifying a clear, coherent, and innovative international agenda that provides an adequate answer to delicate issues such as security – both military and economic – and the growing need to make different layers of government compatible with one another.
- ▶ Developing a new narrative and communication tools that will make it possible to reconnect with groups who speak the language of change and innovation, such as young people and intellectuals, while remaining in touch with traditional groups, such as technocrats, who employ a more »realistic« language.
- ▶ Renovation of social democratic parties' culture and structures, which are currently too conservative and prone to endogamy.
- ▶ Strengthening of the role of the state at all levels, especially the local, together with those of civil society and individual responsibility, in three contexts: as citizens, as members of communities and as family members.

## Closing Remarks

The PSOE is one of the major political forces in Spain. A crucial agent during the transition process, its discourse and agenda have become drivers of important social and civil changes since the party returned to power in 2004, under the leadership of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Spain is today one of the most progressive countries in Europe in terms of civil rights, and has developed the fourth pillar of the welfare state, which deals partly with one of the major challenges facing the European Union: rapid demographic ageing. At the same time, the PSOE has started to develop a new conceptual and policy framework for a new economic and productive model, focused on social, environmental, and economic sustainability.

The global economic crisis has had a significant impact on the country and public perceptions of the PSOE and its credibility. The deterioration of public support has been due partly to the limited room to maneuver of the Spanish government in recent months, since the European Union-coordinated response to the crisis in this second phase of the recovery is being defined by the preponderance of conservative governments. However, the situation is likely to improve in the coming months, when the reforms the government is negotiating with the social and economic partners start to be implemented, and measures to regulate and tax



financial markets are adopted in international forums, as promoted by the Spanish Socialist Party.

Over the next two years, leading up to the general election, the PSOE will continue to work on renewing and developing its long-term ideological framework and policy agenda, strengthening its alliances within civil society and internationally, and developing immediate measures that deal adequately with the crisis, with a view to improving living standards across the board, protecting the most vulnerable, and ensuring that the progressive values of social justice and cohesion, freedom, opportunity, and sustainability remain at the center of the government's actions.

Table 2:  
Spanish Governments since the Transition

	<i>Party</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Majority</i>	<i>Partners</i>
<i>1977–1982</i>	UCD	Adolfo Suárez	Yes	All parties
<i>1982–1986</i>	PSOE	Felipe González	Yes	
<i>1986–1989</i>	PSOE	Felipe González	Yes	
<i>1989–1993</i>	PSOE	Felipe González	50 %	
<i>1993–1996</i>	PSOE	Felipe González	No	PNV, CiU
<i>1996–2000</i>	PP	José María Aznar	No	PNV, CiU
<i>2000–2004</i>	PP	José María Aznar	Yes	
<i>2004–2008</i>	PSOE	José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero	No	PNV, CiU
<i>2008–Today</i>	PSOE	José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero	No	CiU

Table 3:  
Electoral Results in Spain, 1977–2008

	<i>1977</i>		<i>1979</i>		<i>1982</i>	
	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats
<i>PCE/IU</i>	9.3	5.7	10.8	6.6	4.0	1.1
<i>PSOE</i>	29.4	33.7	30.5	34.6	48.4	57.7
<i>UCD</i>	34.6	47.4	35.9	48.0	6.5	3.4
<i>AP/PP</i>	8.8	4.6	6.1	2.6	26.5	30.3
<i>CiU</i>	2.8	3.1	2.7	0.3	3.7	3.4
<i>PNV</i>	1.7	2.3	1.5	2.0	1.9	2.3

	1986		1989		1993	
	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats
<i>IU</i>	4.5	2.0	9.1	4.9	9.6	5.1
<i>PSOE</i>	44.6	52.6	39.9	50.0	38.3	45.4
<i>AP/PP</i>	26.3	3.0	25.9	30.6	34.8	40.3
<i>CiU</i>	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	4.9	4.9
<i>PNV</i>	1.6	1.7	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.4

	1996		2000		2004	
	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats
<i>IU</i>	10.6	6.0	5.5	2.3	5.3	1.42
<i>PSOE</i>	37.5	40.3	34.1	35.7	43.3	46.85
<i>PP</i>	38.8	44.6	44.5	52.3	38.3	42.28
<i>CiU</i>	4.6	4.6	4.2	4.3	3.3	2.85
<i>PNV</i>	1.3	1.4	1.5	2.0	1.6	2.0
<i>ERC</i>	0.7	0.3	0.8	0.3	2.5	2.28

	2008	
	% Votes	% Seats
<i>IU</i>	3.77	0.57
<i>PSOE</i>	43.87	48.29
<i>PP</i>	39.94	44.00
<i>CiU</i>	3.03	2.86
<i>UPyD</i>	1.19	0.29
<i>PNV</i>	1.19	1.71
<i>ERC</i>	1.16	0.86

Source: Encarnacion (2008) and Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) survey.

Table 4:  
European Election Results, 1987–2009, PSOE and PP

	1987		1989		1994	
	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats
PSOE	39.06 %	28	39.57 %	27	30.79 %	22
PP	24.65 %	17	21.41 %	15	40.12 %	28
	1999		2004		2009	
	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats
PSOE	35.33 %	24	43.46 %	25	38.51 %	21
PP	39.74 %	27	41.21	24	43.23 %	23

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### Abbreviations

AP: Alianza Popular (until 1988, thereafter Partido Popular)

ciU: Convergència i Unió

ERC: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya

IU: Izquierda Unida

PCE: Partido Comunista de España

PNV: Partido Nacionalista Vasco

PP: Partido Popular

PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español

UCD: Unión de Centro Democrático

UPyD: Unión Progreso y Democracia

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