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**Socialists Obtain Plurality in Andalusian Regional Vote**

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Two young parties – Podemos and Ciudadanos – made their debut in the balloting, but with 97.65 percent of the votes counted, the PSOE won 47 of the 109 seats in the regional legislature, while the center-right Popular Party, which governs Spain at the national level, won 33 districts, the leftist Podemos 15, the liberal centrist Ciudadanos 9 and the leftist Izquierda Unida 5.

The importance of the vote is based on the fact that it is the first Spanish election in a year in which Spaniards will go to the polls in May to choose officials in 8,000 cities and 13 regions and will renew the national Parliament in November.

With a population of 8.3 million, Andalusia – Spain's largest region – has been governed by the Socialists for the past three decades and the results on Sunday confirm their continued dominance, albeit with a somewhat different configuration because more parties are now present in the regional parliament and the PSOE will need to forge political alliances – which, in all likelihood, will be rather problematic – to achieve a governing majority.

The appearance of Podemos and Ciudadanos – which are calling for democratic renewal – on the Spanish political scene have drawn votes from the two large parties, the PP and the PSOE, which have alternated in power at the national level for more than three decades.

Both large parties, however, have been hurt at the polls by assorted corruption scandals and for their handling of Spain's economic crisis, which are the two issues that are of greatest concern

to Spaniards, according to recent opinion surveys.

Nearly 6.5 million voters were eligible to cast ballots in the Andalusian regional elections, and the polls were scheduled to close at 8:00 p.m.

Public opinion surveys ahead of the vote showed the Socialists winning, but without an absolute majority, forcing party leaders to hammer out pacts to govern.

Pre-election poll results also indicated that Spain's traditional two-party system would be broken by the emergence of Podemos and Ciudadanos, with the four parties separated by only a few percentage points in voter surveys.

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