

# [***Socialists deal blow to separatists in Catalan elections but face uphill task to form government***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C16-VXD1-DYMD-640V-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

MADRID — Spain’s ruling Socialist party scored a crucial victory in regional elections in the powerful northeastern region of Catalonia, garnering the most seats and dealing a blow to the region’s two main separatist parties that have governed for decades.

But candidate Salvador Illa failed to win a majority in Sunday's voting, and will face tough negotiations if he wants to form a government.

[*Illa’s party won 42 seats*](https://apnews.com/article/spain-catalonia-election-puigdemont-illa-pedro-sanchez-6286cd67a5db7a34f7ea4e46e4052203), and it was the first time the Socialists led a Catalan election in both votes and seats won. The result would seem to be a perfect payoff for Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and his efforts to reduce tensions in Catalonia in recent years, despite major opposition from right-leaning parties in Spain.

“The biggest takeaway from the election was that it’s the worst result for the forces of Catalan independence since 1982,” said Andrew Dowling, a specialist in Catalan history at Cardiff University in Wales.

But equally important, "it’s an excellent result for Pedro Sánchez, an excellent result for the government in Madrid,” Dowling said in a telephone interview Monday with The Associate Press.

But Illa will need the support of 26 other lawmakers to form a government in the 135-seat chamber in Barcelona — or he could try to secure the agreement of parties outside the proposed coalition to abstain from voting to make it easier for his bloc to gain a simply majority.

For the moment he has the backing of six deputies from the leftist Sumar group with whom Sánchez forms the country's minority coalition government in Madrid.

But he will still need support or abstention from another group, possibly the pro-independence Republican Left of Catalonia of the sitting regional president, Pere Aragonès. But that party plummeted to 20 seats from 33 and a deal to support Illa could be suicidal.

Aragonès on Monday announced he would not take his seat in the next parliament and was retiring from front-line ***politics***. He ruled out doing any deals with the Socialists and the right-leading Junts (Together) led by [*Carles Puigdemont*](https://apnews.com/article/carles-puigdemont-catalonia-spain-election-secession-amnesty-81a7df48409335382d2e7a688966bd7e). the fugitive former regional president.

Junts finished second with 35 seats. Speaking from France on Monday, Puigdemont said he intends to try to form a government with other separatist groups.

But the reality is that the four pro-independence parties, including Junts, only tot up 61 seats, seven short of a majority. Most of the other parties vehemently oppose Puigdemont.

The quagmire is made even more complicated by the fact that Sánchez relies on the support of Junts and the Republican Left to shore up his government in Madrid.

That was basically in return for Sánchez’s decision to try to calm matters in Catalonia in recent years by pardoning jailed high-profile separatists and moving forward on a controversial [*amnesty for Puigdemont and hundreds more*](https://apnews.com/article/spain-politics-catalonia-amnesty-sanchez-8d647b740274a8f01d5a08b32e8ceacb).

Puigdemont on Monday ruled out threatening the national government should Illa be able to form a government in Barcelona.

The Socialists have interpreted Sunday's results as putting an end to the illegal secessionist push by Puigdemont.

“Catalonia has decided to open a new era,” a triumphant Illa told supporters Sunday night. “Catalan voters have decided that the Socialist Party will lead this new era, and it is my intention to become Catalonia’s next president.”

The party's spokeswoman in Catalonia, Núria Parlon, said Monday that the Socialists hope to form a government with the support of the Republican Left and Sumar. She ruled out Puigdemont's initiative.

“We will not support Puigdemont’s investiture, the people have spoken clearly and the independence movement at this moment does not have a legitimate majority to demand this government headed by Carles Puigdemont," Parlon said.

Separatists have held the regional government in Barcelona since 2012 and had won majorities in four consecutive regional elections. But polling and a national election in July showed that support for secession has shrunk.

Cardiff University's Dowling believes Illa has the best possibility of forming a government and did not rule out him doing so by getting abstention of the right-leaning Popular Party and the far right VOX, who detest the whole idea of the Catalan separatism.

But he also ventured the possibility of “a totally surprising” administration led by the Socialists and Junts together, arguing that with the independence cause losing force the two parties actually have a lot in common on economic issues and combined they would have an absolute majority.

“There’s going to be a lot of backroom deals to be considered,” he said. “There are many, many moving plates.”

The newly elected lawmakers are due to take their seats on June 10.

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Wilson contributed from Barcelona, Spain.

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