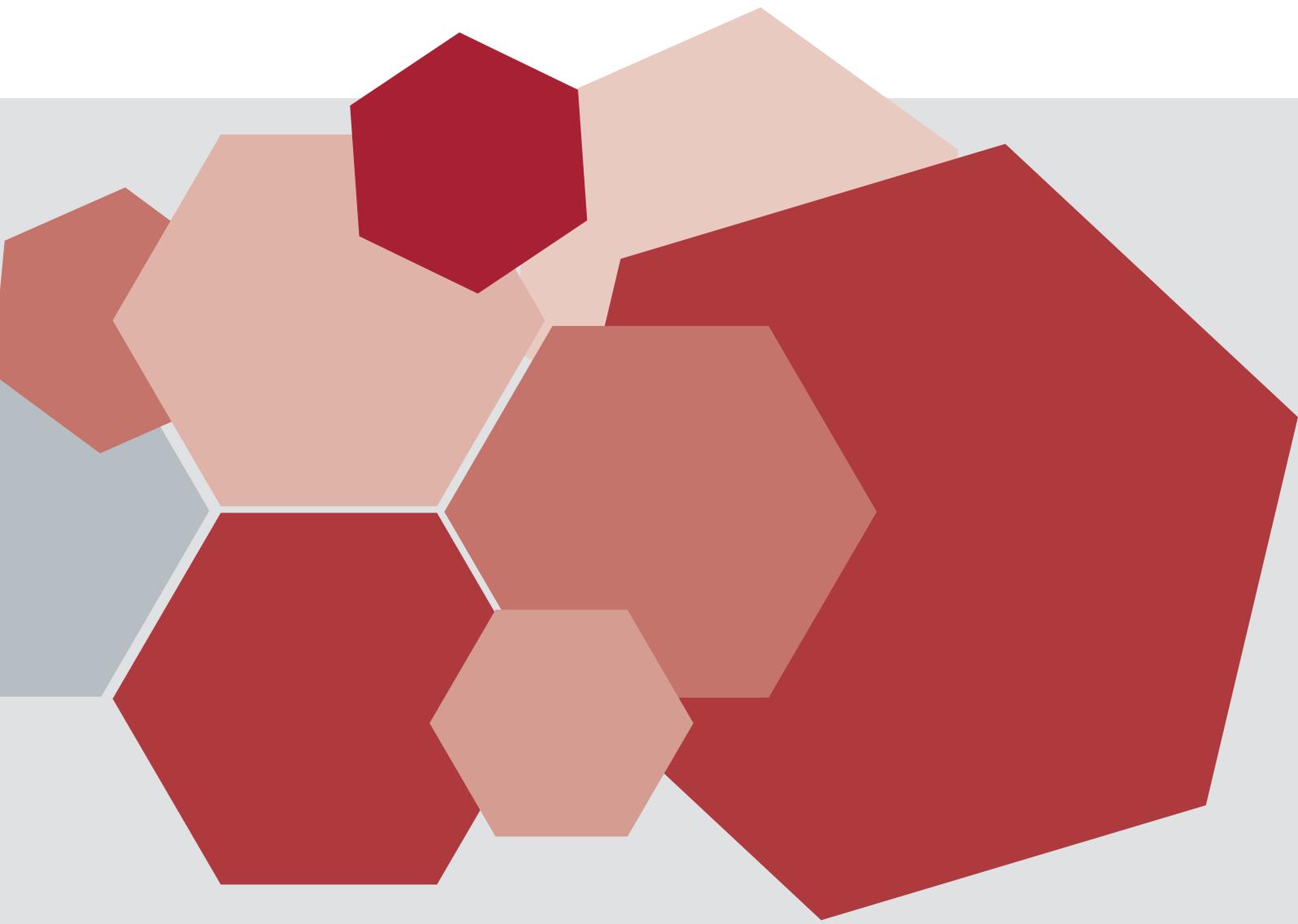


The independence conflict in Catalonia



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Real Instituto Elcano - (updated version 2019)



Real Instituto Elcano - Madrid - España
www.realinstitutoelcano.org

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C/ Príncipe de Vergara, 51
28006 Madrid
www.realinstitutoelcano.org

ISBN: 978-84-92983-19-3

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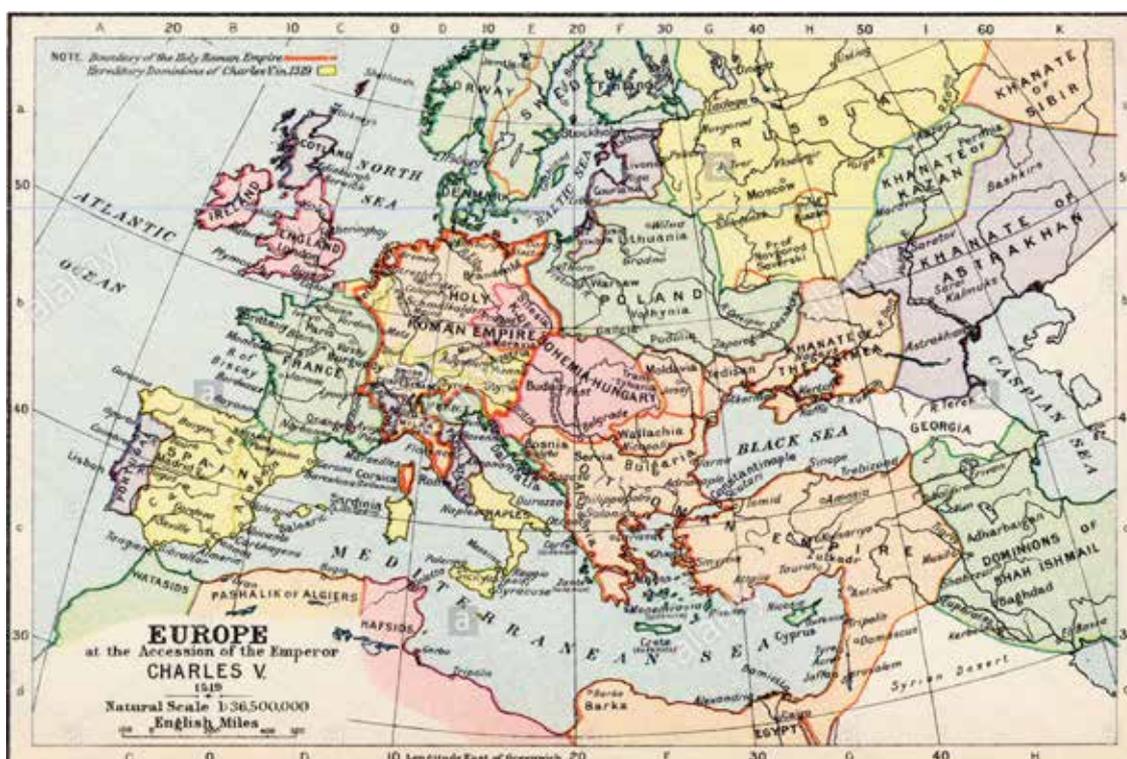
Outline

1. The territorial pluralism of Spain and the “State of Autonomies”
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1. The territorial pluralism of Spain and the “State of Autonomies”

- The complexity of the centre and the periphery when it comes to territorial matters and identity is a distinctive feature of the Spanish political system. This feature is shared with other plural democracies such as Belgium, Canada and the UK (and, to a lesser extent, Italy and Switzerland).
- Nonetheless, Spain is one of the few states in Europe that has successfully preserved its national integrity. In contrast to the rest of the continent, Spain’s borders have remained unaltered for five centuries and there has not been a single territorial change in the last two centuries (colonial possessions aside).

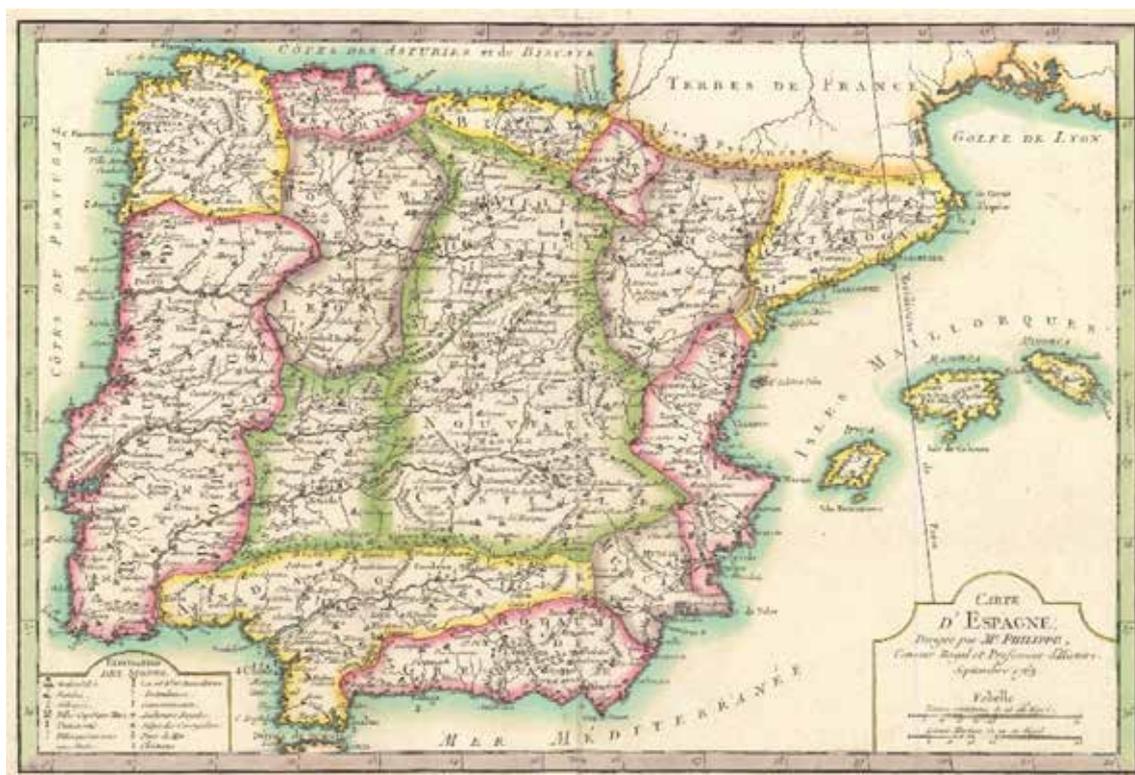
Figure 1. Europe in 1519



Source: *Historical Atlas*, W. & A.K. Johnston Ltd, 1911.

- The reasons for the paradoxical balance between preserving the country's integrity, on the one hand, and power and identity struggles between the centre and the periphery, on the other, are bound up with the country's history and its institutions, interests and dominant political ideas.
- Countries with high levels of ethnic and territorial pluralism are common outside the West. In Europe, however, the paradigm of the nation state has prevailed. The tendency has been for either the assimilation of alternative peripheral identities (not just minorities), along the lines of France, or cleaving them from the existing state and creating a new one. Mixed identities and decentralised power are rare.
- In contrast, this small group of non-homogeneous European states is characterised by their different individual histories, with all the diversity and complexity this entails. In the case of Spain, there are a number of main features:
 1. Its origin and formation centuries ago was only partly based on identity and was more religious than proto-national.
 2. Spain successfully projected itself as an empire and subsequently remained relatively isolated from the modern conflicts that shaped the continent.
 3. The state experienced early and effective construction between the 15th and 18th centuries. The modern national construction came much later in the 19th and 20th centuries and with much more upheaval. Both processes took place under the leadership of Castile, which occupied the central position and the dominant language.
 4. Nonetheless, the centre never had the strength to impose a process of homogenisation. Throughout this period, it has faced competition from alternative identities in peripheral territories, the most significant being Catalonia and the Basque Country, both positioned near the arteries of European development.
- We should also note that, just as the map of Spain has remained intact for centuries, the contours marking out the strong individual personalities of certain Spanish territories have persisted (in the case of Catalonia, these boundaries have gone unchanged since the second half of the 17th century). This is in contrast to France, Germany and Italy, where the regional configurations have undergone relatively frequent changes.

Figure 2. Regional organisation of Spain during the *Ancien Régime*



Note: the Canary Islands have also been an integral part of Spain since the 16th century.
Source: Instituto Geográfico Nacional. Map by Etienne André Philippe de Pretot, 1763.

- Catalonia and the Basque Country were never kingdoms or independent states. The majority of what is now Catalonia was the County of Barcelona in the Early Middle Ages, before becoming part of the Crown (not the Kingdom) of Aragon in 1162 and then part of the Spanish Monarchy from 1479. The mediaeval organs of self-government, which came under a brief spell of French sovereignty in 1641, were abolished in 1714 following the War of Spanish Succession, when Spain ceased to be a composite monarchy and became an absolutist unitary kingdom.
- Despite their initial conservative bias (opposed to Jacobin liberalism), nationalism in the Basque Country and Catalonia subsequently became associated with the fight against the authoritarian and military tendencies that often dominated the centre.
- Catalan nationalism rose to prominence at the start of the 20th century, driven by the dual base of the rural population and a modernising middle class. The region simultaneously experienced two dynamic processes: the cultural *renaixença* and an industrialisation marked by its privileged geographic location. These occurred in the

context of a weak Spanish State but with a large protected internal market, favouring the first major waves of migrations to Catalonia, which led to the current pluralist nature of Catalan society.

- Regional self-rule was closely linked to freedom in the 20th century. The autonomy enjoyed by Catalonia during periods of democracy (1914-23 and 1931-39) was rescinded by the dictatorships of Primo de Rivera (1923-30) and Franco (1939-75). The Franco regime recentralised power and was initially extremely hostile to the Catalan language, despite some tolerance of its use socially from the 1960s, coinciding with strong economic development.
- After the transition to democracy, the Constitution of 1978, which enjoyed overwhelming support throughout Spain and especially in Catalonia, decreed that sovereignty rested in the hands of the Spanish people as a whole, adding that regions and 'nationalities' had the right to political autonomy. Two of the seven members of the committee that drafted the Constitution currently in force were Catalans.

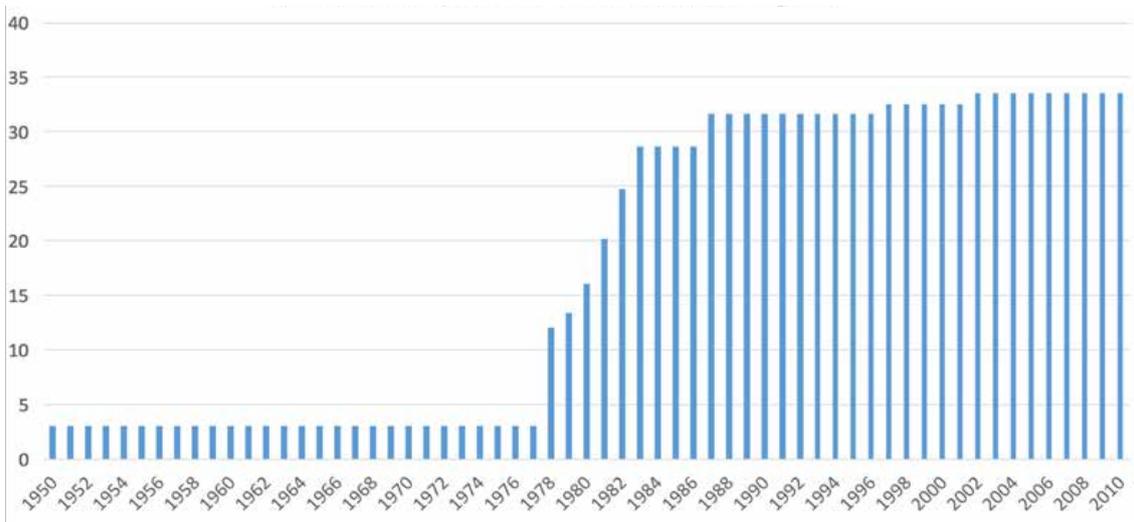
Figure 3. Constitutional referendum of 1978

	Electors	Turnout	YES votes	NO votes	Blank/spoilt
SPAIN	26,632,180	67.1%	87.9%	7.8%	4.2%
Catalonia	4,398,173	67.9%	90.5%	4.6%	4.9%

Source: Ministry of the Interior.

- Although the desire for self-rule was widespread throughout almost all of Spain, political forces in Catalonia (nationalist and federalist) played an especially strong role in the promotion and development of the 'State of the Autonomies'. The Catalan and Basque Statutes (1979) were the first to be approved in referendums and received strong public backing (88.15% in the case of Catalonia).
- Between 1980 and 1983, the other regions of Spain also created Statutes of Autonomy with significant powers (albeit less than in the Basque Country and Catalonia).
- In contrast to the slow and timid process of regional devolution in the United Kingdom, Italy and, later on, France, the territorial organisation of Spain passed from hyper-centralisation to a *de facto* federation in just five years. After Belgium, Spain is the European country that has most decentralised its state structure in the last half-century.

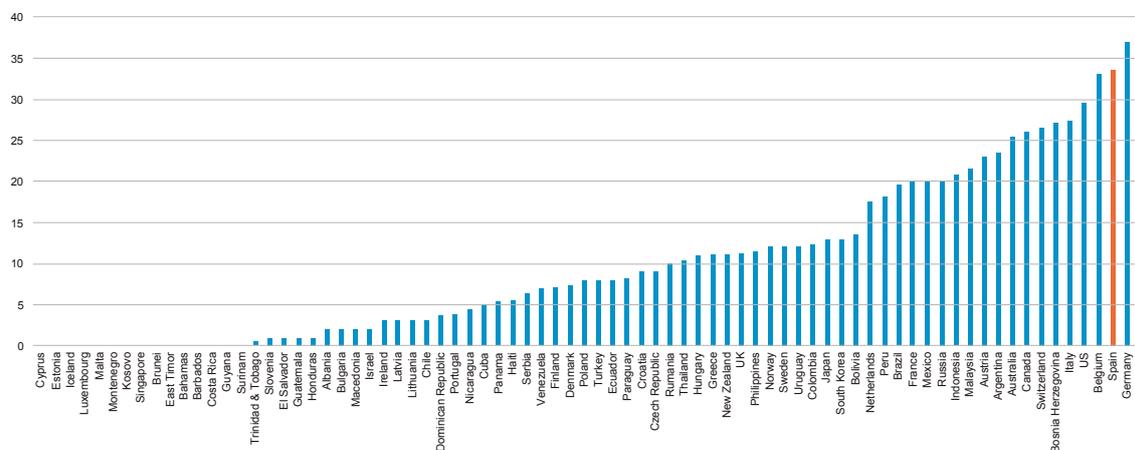
Figure 4. Score of Spain in the Regional Authority Index, 1950–2010



Source: Sánchez de la Cruz (2017), based on data from L. Hooghe et al. (2016), *Measuring Regional Authority*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

- According to the Regional Authority Index (RAI), Spain's State of Autonomies currently makes it the second most decentralised state in the world, with only Germany ahead.

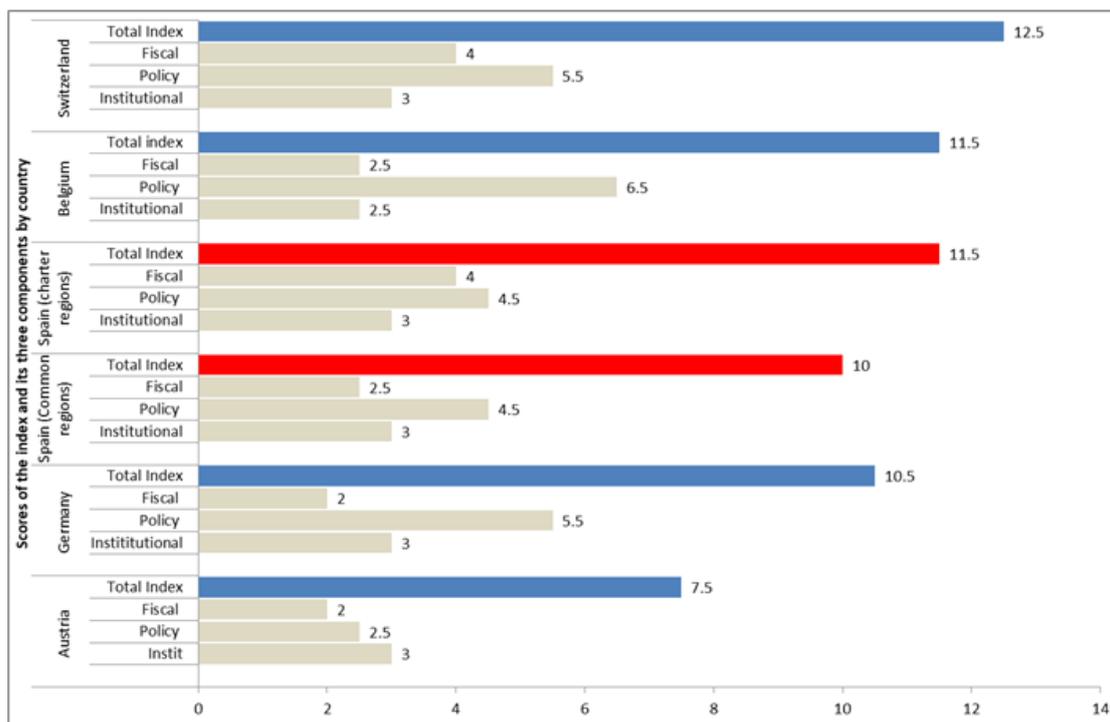
Figure 5. Regional Authority Index, 2010



Source: Sánchez de la Cruz (2017).

- Other regional self-rule indexes (eg, Dardanelli, 2019) even rank the power enjoyed by the Spanish autonomous communities as equal to or greater than German *Länder* (and only slightly below Swiss cantons, Belgian regions and specific cases like the Faroe Islands in Denmark).
- The powers of the autonomous regions are not only broad from the institutional and legal perspectives (guaranteed by the Constitutional Court) but they effectively translate into a different political system and wide-ranging public spending.
- Nonetheless, certain features of the model of territorial organisation could have limited real autonomy. The central power's use of funding and basic legislation generates conflicts and might even lead to the erosion of regional powers. The ineffectiveness of the Senate as a territorial chamber also means the high level of self-government is barely reflected in the participation of autonomous communities in state decisions (shared rule).
- Despite the theoretical scarcity of shared rule, Catalonia and the Basque Country have developed an indirect form of power to influence governance of the state through sub-state nationalist parties in the central parliament.
- This indirect mechanism for exercising power, which is highly imperfect because it lies not in institutions but in specific parties, has created grievances with the rest of Spain, strengthening the asymmetry of informal power in certain areas in favour of the Basque Country, Catalonia and, to a lesser extent, other large regions.
- In terms of funding, however, Catalonia's revenue system is similar to the other autonomous communities that are subject to the standard *régimen común* arrangement, whereby tax revenue is collected by the Spanish state. Yet while its contribution is roughly proportional to its wealth and funding is in line with its population, certain leaders aspire to the *régimen de concierto* system, in which revenue is collected by decentralised government and a proportion paid to central government and which applies to the Basque Country and Navarra, also wealthy but which contribute less.

Figure 6. Index of decentralisation in Western Europe, 2015



Source: Colino (2019), based on data from Dardanelli (2019), 'Conceptualizing, measuring, and mapping state structures,' *Publius*, nr 49, p. 271-298.

2. Catalonia: its significance, internal diversity and extensive powers of self-rule

- Objectively, Catalonia is of undeniable importance to Spain on account of its demographic, economic, cultural and political weight.
- At the start of the 20th century, Catalonia made up just 10.5% of the Spanish population. However, economic growth attracted large-scale immigration from all across Spain, especially in the 1950s. In 1981, Catalonia made up 15.8% of the total population of Spain (currently 16.3%).

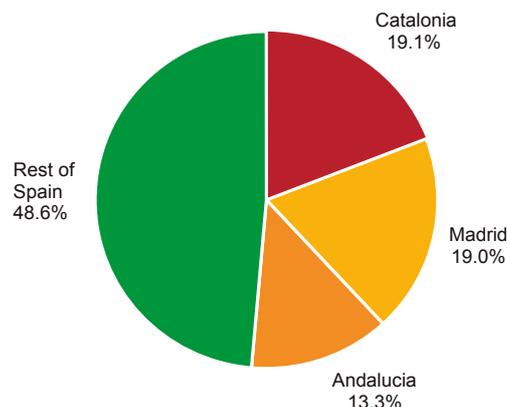
Figure 7. Population: Spain and Catalonia, 2018



Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), 2019.

- Its relative standard of living means its regional GDP makes up 19% of Spain's GDP, making it the most prosperous part of the country (around 20% higher than the national average). In 2018, it was the origin of 25% of Spanish exports and made up 21.9% of jobs derived from the country's foreign investment.

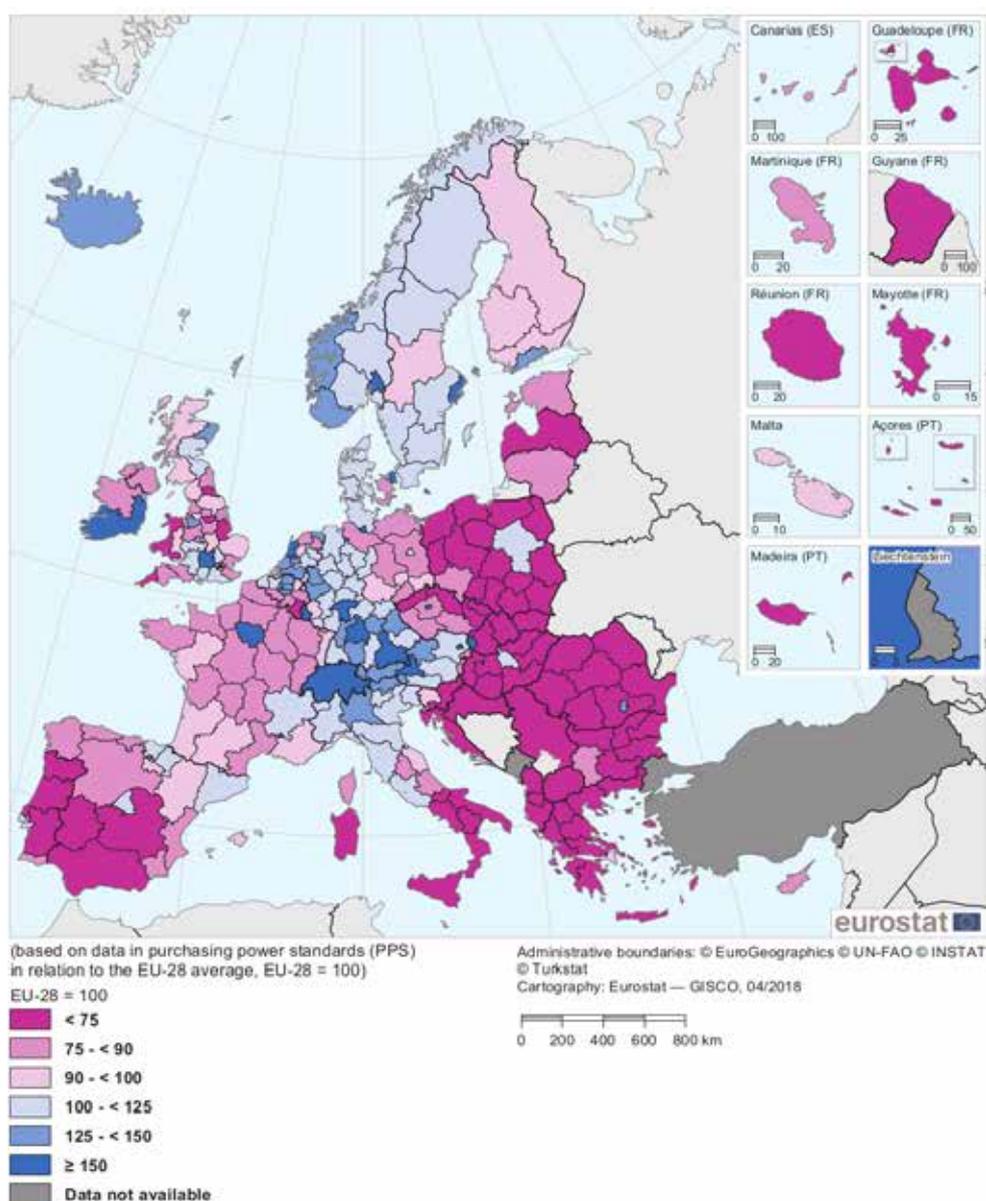
Figure 8. Economic weighting: Spain and Catalonia, 2018



Source: INE (2019), 'Contabilidad regional de España'.

- Catalonia's GDP per capita is also high from a European perspective: 110% of the EU average in 2017. When adjusted to take into account purchasing power, if it were part of France it would be its second most prosperous region, after only Paris. The figure is far higher than the neighbouring region of Languedoc-Roussillon (76%) and of Portugal (77%), which does not form part of the Spanish market. In fact, the small state of Monaco is the only country on the Mediterranean coast with an income above that of Catalonia.

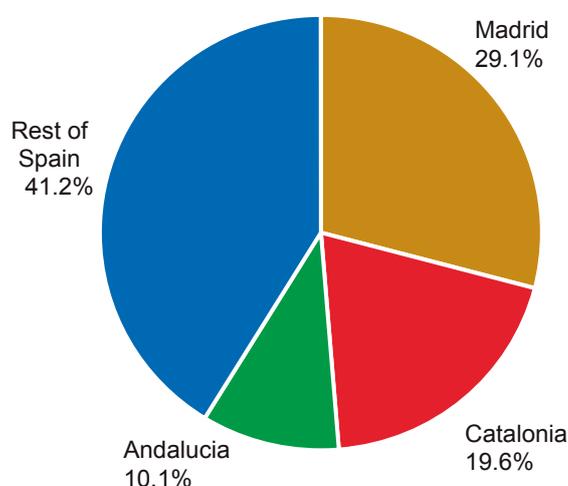
Figure 9. Regional GDP: percentage per capita above the European average, 2017



Source: Eurostat, 2017.

- Catalonia's contribution to Spain's global presence (calculated by the Elcano Royal Institute based on three components: economic, military and soft power) is also high, accounting for 19.6% of the total and second only to Madrid.

Figure 10. Contribution to the global presence of Spain (%)

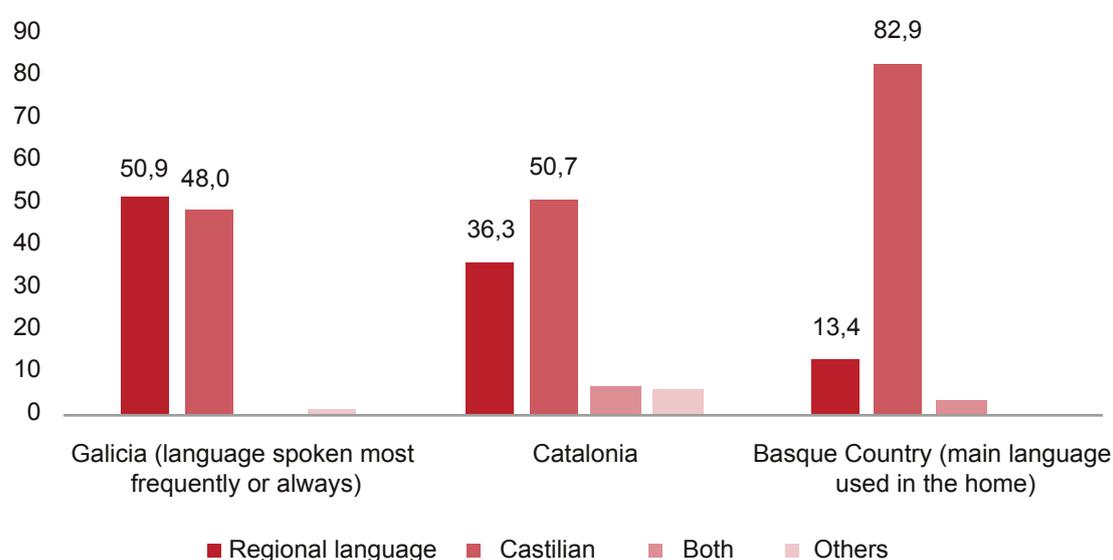


Source: Real Instituto Elcano.

- One aspect that best reflects the territorial pluralism of Spain (and the cultural and political personality of Catalonia) is its linguistic diversity. Spanish is the common and official language, known and spoken by practically all the country's population. However, various autonomous communities have a number of other official languages, such as Catalan, Galician and Basque (and even minor languages like Aranese within Catalonia itself).
- As well as being an official language in Andorra, Catalan is the most important sub-state language in Europe. Moreover, 10 of the EU's 24 official languages have less speakers.
- However, this undeniable value does not make Catalonia the autonomous community with the highest percentage of people who commonly speak a language other than Spanish and nor does it mean that Catalan is spoken more than Spanish in Catalonia.
- Galicia is the only Spanish territory whose local language is spoken more than Castilian Spanish (51%). In contrast, Basque –or Euskera– is only commonly used by 13.4% of people in the Basque Country. In Catalonia, 36% of the population regularly uses Catalan (compared to 50% for Spanish). Moreover, while Catalonia has the largest absolute number of Catalan speakers, its use in relative terms is more common in the

Balearics (46%) and the community of Valencia (40%), albeit in this latter case with certain specific features and under the name Valencian.

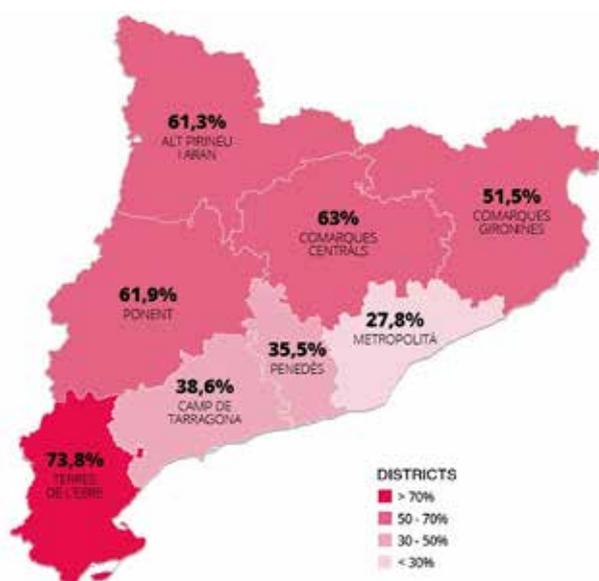
Figure 11. The most commonly-used languages in Galicia, Catalonia and the Basque Country



Source: Penadés (2017), based on data from the Galician, (IGE), Catalan (Idescat) and Basque (Eustat) statistical institutes.

- A separate but relevant point is that Catalan is more widely spoken among the elite in Catalonia than the working classes, while in all other cases the urban middle classes tend to prefer Spanish over their local language.
- Despite its prestige among the middle and upper classes, the use of Catalan is particularly widespread in rural communities in the interior, while Spanish is more commonly spoken in cities (it is the first language of around 70% of the metropolitan area of Barcelona).

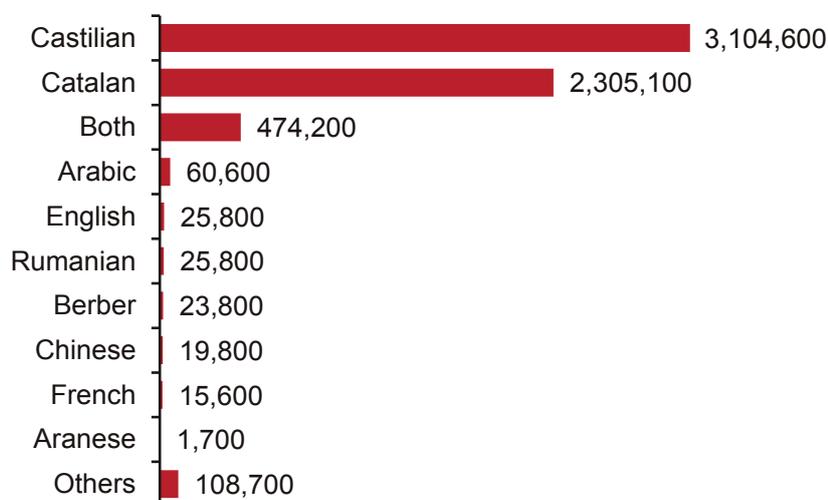
Figure 12. Territorial distribution of Catalan, 2013 (percentage as most commonly used language)



Source: Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya (2013), 'Encuesta de usos lingüísticos de la población'

- The fact that the urban population, much of which has family ties to the rest of Spain, is larger makes Spanish the most commonly spoken language in Catalonia

Figure 13. Languages most commonly used in Catalonia, 2019



Source: Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya (2019), 'Encuesta de usos lingüísticos de la población'

- The emphasis on Catalan in education (and also symbolically) is creating growing political tensions. Nonetheless, the mutual intelligibility of the two languages means 99% of Catalans can understand Spanish and 95% of Spanish-speakers can understand Catalan.
- Since approval of the Statute of Autonomy in 1979, Catalonia has enjoyed a high level of self-rule through its institutions (a parliament, government and Premier) known collectively as the Generalitat. In 2006, a more advanced Statute was approved. Despite obtaining 74% of the vote in a referendum, participation was below 50%, meaning the level of support was much lower than for the first Statute and, above all, the Constitution of 1978.
- Despite the Constitutional Court quashing certain articles related to the organisation of an autonomous judicial power and interpretation recognising Catalonia as a 'nation', the autonomous community enjoys wide-ranging powers (some of which are exclusive). These include:
 - Protection of the Catalan language and culture, public order and justice (including its own police force and prisons), education, the media, public health and sanitation, civil law, symbols and a wide range of powers over economic growth, agriculture and fisheries, internal trade, consumption, energy, industry, tourism, credit institutions, water, housing, the environment, public works, land planning and urban development, transport, immigration, social matters, employment, sport and entertainment, science, universities, associations, administration and local government.
- Catalonia also has its own treasury with a high level of public spending, in addition to powers over borrowing. However, the majority of its tax revenue –and pensions in the social security system– is controlled by the central government. The mechanisms for territorial funding are objectively determined by law –after reforms resulting from complex negotiations in which the Catalan government actively participated–, including articles to ensure solidarity. As in all decentralised States, both the formula to establish distributive and redistributive criteria and their effective application generates tension between the most populated and prosperous regions (such as Catalonia) and those which are poorer or less populated. Over the past 10 years there has been a marked increase in the tension between the State and the Catalan government regarding the decentralisation of powers and resources.

- Foreign policy is exclusively reserved to central government although the Catalan government has its own international department, traditionally focused on trade and culture. In recent years, however, the network of Catalan offices has engaged in para-diplomatic work, which is frowned upon by Madrid.
- Over this period, electoral support for Catalan nationalist parties has remained highly stable. There has, however, been some erosion of the so-called 'dual vote' (the tendency to only vote for Spanish or Catalan parties depending on the level of the elections), which has resulted in a slight increase in support for nationalism in general elections and a fall in support in regional elections.

Figure 14. Change in the vote for Catalan nationalist parties, 1984–2019

Regional elections (selected years)	General elections in Catalonia (selected years)
1984: 52.5%	1986: 34.7%
1992: 54.2%	1993: 36.8%
2003: 47.5%	2004: 36.7%
2010: 50%	2011: 36.4%
2017: 47.4%	2019: 39.4%

Source: Ministry of the Interior.

3. Explanatory factors and the sovereignty process (2012–2017)

- Prior to the last decade, Catalan society could be roughly divided into three equal parts based on identity and political behaviour:
 - a) A segment comprising the rural population and the middle and upper classes in urban residential districts, whose only or main national identity is Catalan, based on its linguistic and cultural differentiation and its relatively high prosperity in Spain.
 - b) A less consistent and mobilised social group comprising the descendants of immigrants from other regions of Spain with a predominantly Spanish identity, whose mother tongue is Spanish and who are concentrated in the metropolitan belt of Barcelona.
 - c) A third segment comprising those with a dual Catalan–Spanish identity who tend to be bilingual in their everyday life, often as a result of mixed marriages between the two previous groups, and who mainly live in urban areas.
- This plural and complex social structure is reflected in the two main moderate political parties: (a) *Convergència i Unió* (CiU), a centre-right nationalist party that has not sought independence and has governed the Generalitat for the majority of the period since 1980; and (b) the centre-left *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* (PSC), the Catalan branch of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE).
- Prior to 2010, support for independence among Catalans was less than 20%. However, the political status quo changed for a number of reasons, some the result of long-term developments and others due to more short-term factors.
- Long-term factors:
 - a) Globalisation and European integration, which can incentivise independence in territories that form part of larger states: free trade and international governance reduce the economies of scale of being part of a large state. There is also less political and economic risk to becoming independent in a supranational area such as the EU.
 - b) A process to build a different national identity from Spain implemented by the Catalan authorities since the 1980s using education and regional television.

c) This drive to create a Catalan identity, together with a power struggle, often clashes with the project for a Spanish nation deriving from the Constitution. While moderate Catalan nationalism contributed to the governability of the state from 1977, this was accompanied by growing mutual distrust. The progressive narrowing of the gap in wealth between Catalonia and the rest of Spain, in parallel to Madrid's rise as Spain's economic hub, has also fostered a perception of losing out in the management of resources.

- Short-term factors:

a) This underlying tension came to a head in the turbulent process for a new Statute of Autonomy, approved by the Catalan people in a referendum in 2006. Following an appeal lodged by the centre-right People's Party (PP), which was in opposition at the time, the Constitutional Court of Spain quashed certain articles in 2010, a move widely rejected by Catalan politicians.

b) In 2008 Spain (including Catalonia) suffered a deep and long recession, which saw a significant rise in unemployment, together with a series of unpopular measures that strongly affected the standard of living of the traditional nationalist bases. The economic crisis had two main effects:

- The rapid deterioration in the legitimacy of the Spanish political system, which not only appeared unable to preserve material prosperity but also found itself embroiled in a series of scandals and fiercely criticised by the so-called *indignados* anti-austerity movement.
- Austerity and the increased central control of public spending from 2010 onwards fed populist messages in Catalonia grounded in fiscal grievances similar to other nationalists in net-contributor territories (eg, UKIP with respect to the EU and Northern League with respect to Italy).

c) The PP replaced PSOE in power at the end of 2011, resulting in a more conservative and centralist adversary in Madrid. Catalan nationalism, seeking to distance itself from the unpopular handling of the crisis and the costs of its own cases of corruption, embraced a strategy based on sovereignty. This allowed it to present a different outlook (design a new country) and even promote itself as a democratic regeneration, which made it more attractive to certain elements of the left who had previously kept a distance from nationalism.

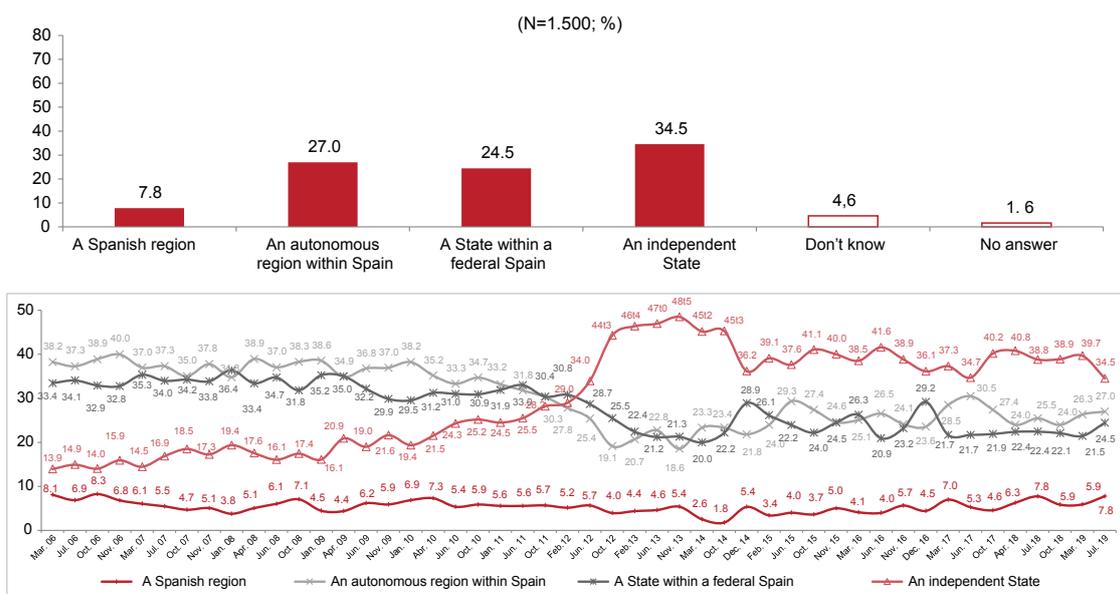
d) The radicalisation of the nationalist elite plunged it into a spiral of escalation that led to its unequivocal support for independence. This shift was fed by a highly mobilised social base, which had been promoting local consultations on secession for some time, resulting in a jump in support for independence in 2012. There was initially no strong opposition to this combination of activism and polarisation due to

the lack of motivation and political resources among the half of Catalan society that wished to remain part of Spain.

e) Finally, a significant external factor was the agreement reached between the Scottish National Party (SNP) and London in 2014 to hold a binding referendum on independence, providing a plausible and respectable procedure for the creation of a new state within Europe.

- In 2012, a major march took place on 11 September to celebrate Catalonia's national day. The event saw support for independence from what had until then been moderate nationalism. It marked the initiation of the sovereignty process by the Premier of the Generalitat, Artur Mas.
- Support for secession peaked at 48.5% in 2013, according to polls by the Centro de Estudios de Opinión de la Generalitat de Catalunya (CEO). It then began to decline gradually and was around 34% in 2019. Nonetheless, it remains much higher than before 2010-12 and the independence movement has continued to show its strong capacity for mobilisation.

Figure 15. Support for independence when asked about different options for a relationship with Spain: "Do you believe that Catalonia should be...?":



Source: Centro de Estudios de Opinión de la Generalitat de Catalunya (CEO), July 2019.

- The independence movement has shown its strength in all the elections in Catalonia since 2012 (three regional, three general, two European and two local). Yet the elections have also shown the absence of a majority.
- In 2014, after the Congress of Deputies rejected the authorisation of an independence referendum by a wide majority, the Generalitat began its own parallel public consultation. This was prohibited by the Constitutional Court and a Catalan court subsequently stripped president Artur Mas of his office for disobedience. However, its organisation was tolerated by the Spanish Prime Minister at the time, Mariano Rajoy. Catalans who opposed the sovereignty process widely abstained (turnout was just 37% with 81% allegedly in favour of secession).
- The regional elections in 2015 were framed as a referendum by pro- independence parties who obtained 47.8% of the vote. However, territorial biases in the electoral system towards the rural interior gave them an absolute majority in parliament (72 out of 135 seats).
- Although it has been shown that support for the independence movement has never reached 50% (either in elections or polls), much less the qualified majority required to reform the current Statute of Autonomy, the nationalist leaders believed that the parliamentary majority gave them sufficient legitimacy to continue the sovereignty process.
- In January 2016, Carles Puigdemont was elected new Premier of the Generalitat. At the time, Puigdemont was a relatively obscure politician whose candidature had been promoted by hard-line supporters of the independence movement.
- From then until September 2017, the strategy to break with Spain was accelerated, with a referendum on self-determination and culminating in a unilateral declaration of independence.
- In a single sitting in September 2017, the Catalan parliament approved two bills to hold a binding referendum and govern the 'legal transition period' that would run from the 'disconnection' with Spain to the full operation of a new republic.
- The bills were given fast-track approval by parliament, completely ignoring opposition protests. The spokesman for the leftist CSQP (the Catalan branch of Podemos) underlined that what was being done was to: 'completely disobey Catalan legality. And the precedent being created is very serious in terms of democracy. The rights of the citizens, the rights of members of parliament cannot be overturned by the majority'. The pro-independence parties also ignored the warnings from parliamentary experts and the ruling of the Council for Statutory Guarantees of Catalonia (an institution of self-rule). The Constitutional Court, which suspended both laws, was similarly ignored. That month, legal action was taken to halt the referendum, followed by major protests against them by pro-independence groups.

- The referendum took place on 1 October, despite prohibitions by various courts and assurances by Mariano Rajoy that it would not go ahead. The voting was marred by upheaval and irregularities, with a turnout of 42% (with 90% in favour of independence, according to statistics from the Generalitat). However, the day was dominated by the coercive action of riot police trying to prevent voting in some schools. This was strongly denounced by the independence movement and highly criticised by most observers.
- The following days saw a strong reaction by upholders of the Constitution in Catalonia and Spain, including large-scale anti-independence protests in Barcelona. On 3 October, King Felipe VI gave a televised speech that had a major impact (viewing figures were as high as 83.5% in Catalonia) and in which he accused the Generalitat of acting on the margins of the law and democracy.
- On 27 October 2017, after a month in which political and social tensions ran high and in which almost all the large businesses headquartered in Catalonia redomiciled to other parts of Spain, the pro-independence groups in the parliament issued an elaborate unilateral declaration of independence. It was supported by just 70 of the 135 members of parliament and had no impact on the effective control of public power or the territory and no international recognition. That same day, the Spanish Government triggered Article 155 of the Constitution (approved by the Senate with 214 votes in favour and 47 against).
- The invocation of Article 155, an exceptional measure, known in comparative law as the federal coercion clause, implied intervening in self-rule, fully dissolving the Catalan Government and Madrid scheduling new regional elections to be held in two months' time. The Catalan authorities did not resist its application, which lasted for just over half a year.
- The courts adopted severe measures against the key figures behind the declaration of independence, whom they accused of rebellion, among other offences. Carles Puigdemont fled to Belgium, accompanied by other members of the deposed government. Oriol Junqueras, who was until then his Deputy, was remanded in custody in November, together with other nationalist leaders.
- The centrist Ciudadanos party, formed in Catalonia just 15 years ago with a clear anti-independence message, won the elections on 21 December. However, the pro-independence parties (Puigdemont, who had fled Spain, led the main party and

Junqueras, who was imprisoned nearby, led the second) were able to command a fresh majority of seats, despite not having a majority of votes.

Figure 16. Vote in the last three autonomous Catalan elections, 2012–2017

	Pro-independence parties	Anti-independence parties	Anti-independence but nationalist	Not nationalist
2012	49.2%	46.5%	24.3%	22.5%
2015	47.8%	50.6%	24.2%	26.4%
2017	47.4%	50.7%	21.2%	29.5%
Change	-1.8 pp	+4.2 pp	-3.1 pp	+7 pp

Source: Ministry of the Interior.

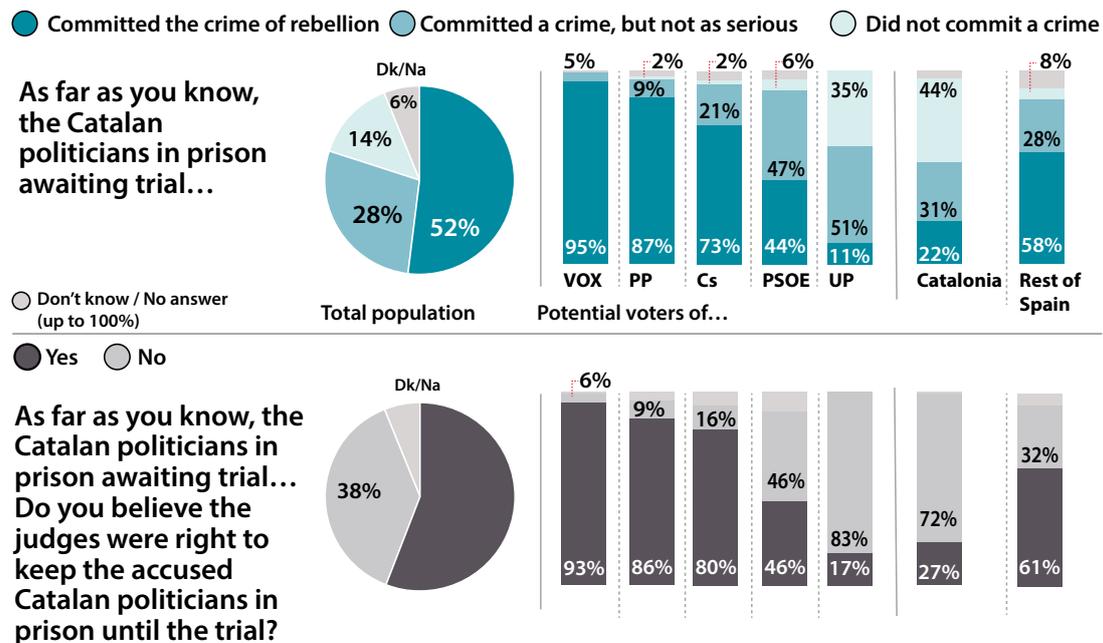
- Three main conclusions can be drawn from the change in the autonomous elections since the start of the sovereignty process:
 - a. Despite a slight dip, the Catalan independence movement has maintained significant support during the radicalisation process (always around 47%-49%).
 - b. The explicit anti-nationalist vote (Ciudadanos and PP) has seen the biggest gain (seven percentage points since 2012). Compared to the historic average of votes for non-Catalan parties prior to 2012, the increase is much higher (18.5 points). In contrast, crosscutting parties, such as the non-nationalist Catalan PSC, have suffered the most.
 - c. This trend, which is accompanied by a context of extremely high turnout, shows the polarisation around identity in Catalan society.
- The failed declaration of Independence at the end of 2017 marked the end of the chapter in the sovereignty process, based on the promise of quick and easy self-determination. This did not, however, mean the end of the conflict.

4. Subsequent political developments since 2018

- On 17 May 2018, after a long confirmation process, Quim Torra, a pro-independence figure and close associate of Puigdemont was elected as the new Catalan Premier. Torra had previously expressed ethnicist and Hispanophobic nationalist ideas.
- On 2 June, after installation of the new government, the suspension of autonomy was lifted. The application of Article 155 had lasted six months. Its use was highly controversial but caused less upheaval than expected, mainly because of the limited scope of its duration and objectives.
- The disruption nonetheless had a negative impact on the Catalan economy. In addition to over 4,000 companies redomiciling their headquarters, there was a sharp fall in foreign investment, a fall in Catalonia's share of exports and slower growth. According to the regional accounting data from the Spanish National Statistics Institute, Spain as a whole grew by 3.2% in 2018, compared to just 2.3% in Catalonia, making it the slowest of the autonomous communities of mainland Spain. Some analysts have talked of a 'Montreal effect', a reference to the fall in the Canadian city's prosperity in favour of Toronto as a result of the rise of the Quebec independence movement in the 1990s.
- Catalan society and politics remain highly segmented and the independence movement has maintained its hard-line rhetoric, albeit avoiding full-scale confrontation. There has also been a change in tone following the success of a censure motion in June 2018 initiated by the socialist Pedro Sánchez, who replaced Mariano Rajoy as Spanish Prime Minister. The circumstantial support of nationalist Catalan parties for the new Spanish Government and a sporadic dialogue between Madrid and the Generalitat has gone some way to de-escalating the conflict.
- Nonetheless, significant sectors of Spanish society remain angered by the secessionist crisis, to the extent that it is possible to talk of a nationalist reaction, beginning in autumn 2017 and involving an unprecedented display of Spanish flags from balconies. In the 2019 general elections, the far-right party VOX won 10% of the vote, putting an end to Spain's exception as one of the few countries in Europe in which far-right ideologies were not present in parliament.
- In an international context, the independence movement has received no support from foreign governments (see section 6 of this report). However, as a cause, the independence referendum and the imprisonment of its leaders have received some sympathy in pro-sovereignty and left-leaning political and intellectual circles.

- In July 2018, Carles Puigdemont won a major victory when courts in Germany, where he had been arrested under a European arrest warrant, ruled that while the former Catalan Premier could be handed over to Spain for the offence of misuse of public funds, the same did not apply to the more serious accusation of rebellion. As a result, the Spanish Supreme Court chose not to extradite him. Attempts to seek judicial cooperation in Scotland and Belgium met with similar results and a number of leaders of the independence movement remain in exile, much to the chagrin of large parts of Spain's judiciary, its political system and the general public.
- The trial of the politicians behind the illegal referendum on 1 October and the subsequent unilateral declaration of independence at the Supreme Court ran for four months (12 February and 12 June 2019). The Prosecutor's Office argued the case for rebellion while the Solicitor General, which represents the Spanish Government, only requested a sentence for sedition and other lesser offences. The difference between the two charges depends on the use of violence and determines the severity of prison sentences.
- According to a poll at the start of the trial, 52% of the Spanish public (significantly higher among people who vote for right-wing parties) believe rebellion took place. While the majority of Catalans believe a crime was committed, just 22% believe there was violence and 44% (a similar figure to those who voted on 1 October) believe no offence took place. Public opinion remains divided on the decision to hold the figures in custody for an extended period of time.

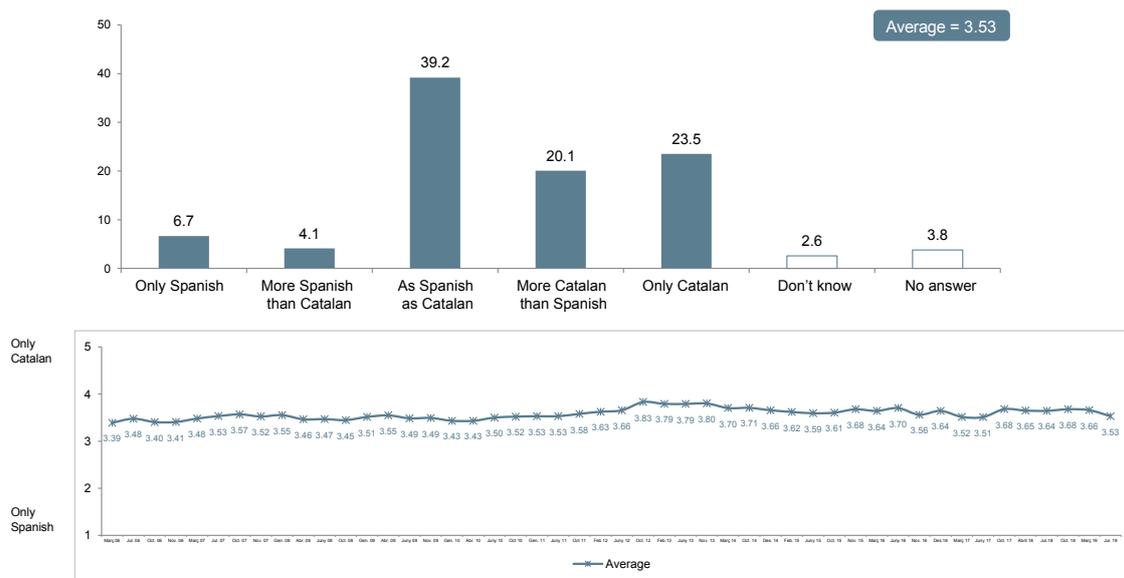
Figure 17. Opinion on the trial of the politicians behind the illegal referendum



Source: Metroscopia survey, February 2019.

- This discrepancy is also reflected in the possibility of measures of reprieve following the trial. Of the Catalans who took part in the poll, 57% believed such measures should apply to any sentence while 62% of people elsewhere in Spain did not support a pardon.
- The ruling is due in the autumn and it is possible the independence movement will seek to capitalise on the reaction of its supporters to the sentence to hold new regional elections to strengthen its majority in parliament and pass the symbolic threshold of 50% of the vote.
- The various elections held in Catalonia in spring 2019 (municipal, general and European) have confirmed the political outlook in Catalonia, with support for independence remaining around 40–50%.
- Polls published in summer 2019 show support for independence has fallen to pre-2012 levels. As many as 70% of Catalans said they wish to maintain some form of political identification with Spain and around 50% said their main political affiliation is to Spain, with hardly any change in the historic average. As such, support for severing ties is far from categorical.

Figure 18. National identification in Catalonia



Source: Centro de Estudios de Opinión de la Generalitat de Catalunya (CEO), July 2019.

- The combination of factors and the correlation of forces mean the integrity of Spain is not in danger. However, the territorial crisis is deep and long-lasting.

5. A comparative perspective: *Brexit*, Scotland and other manifestations of independence

- From a comparative perspective, the Catalan conflict is extremely interesting, since it touches on almost all contemporary political debates:
 - The meaning of sovereignty in the 21st century and the consequences of globalisation and European integration on societies. The uncertainties these processes have created can prompt a desire to seek refuge in primordial identities or, from less nationalist perspectives, the reimagining of a new state on which to project utopias. Moreover, as the Brexit debate shows, there is also the question of what it means to be independent in an increasingly interdependent world.
 - The rise of populism, which seeks to provide simple answers to complex questions and the parallel use of disinformation and social media.
 - The crisis of contemporary democracy. The tension between representative institutions, large-scale constitutional consensus and respect for the rule of law pitted against the idea of direct democracy, the mobilisation of the public and decisionism.
 - The relationship between majorities and minorities in plural states and heterogeneous societies from the perspective of identity and language, the future of federalism and the legitimacy of secession in non-colonial and non-remedial contexts, as well as the reaction of the parent state and the international community.
- All the above explains why the sovereignty process in Catalonia has been compared to Brexit and other pro-independence movements.
- Some of the most active independence movements of advanced democracies in recent times have taken place in rich territories and been driven by conservative ideologies (Flanders, Padania, South Tyrol and Veneto). There are also others that are not based on economic reasons and have even put forward progressive programmes (Scotland and, to a lesser extent, Quebec). Catalonia, which lies somewhere in the middle, has always sought the same treatment as Scotland. However, there are a number of features where the two movements differ.
- There are four main differences between Catalonia and Scotland that are commonly cited in the Spanish political debate:
 - a) The process that led to the 2014 referendum in Scotland was agreed, in contrast to the unilateralism of Catalonia. The Catalan process has ignored the large opposition majority in the Spanish parliament.

- b) While the Scottish independence process respected the rule of law, the Catalan process flagrantly contravened it, both in terms of Spanish legislation (with many rulings by the Constitutional Court going unheeded) and European legislation ('[The Union] shall respect essential State functions [of member states], including ensuring the territorial integrity of the State...', Article 4.2 of the Treaty on the European Union).
 - c) In the Spanish Constitution, sovereignty lies with the Spanish people as a whole, in contrast to the expressly compound nature of the United Kingdom.
 - d) Without Catalonia, the project of the Spanish nation would fail. The situation is similar to Quebec in Canada, while Scotland is ultimately perceived as being less indispensable to the rest of the United Kingdom.
- There are also another four significant and less well-known differences:
 - a) Spain's strong pro-European outlook is in contrast to Britain's euro-scepticism. While Scotland is one of the most pro-European territories in the United Kingdom, Catalonia is one of the least pro-European autonomous communities (as shown by the results of the referendum on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in 2005 and a number of recent polls). Furthermore, pro-independence voters are less pro-EU than people who vote for non-independence parties.

Figure 19. Support for the EU among voters in the European Parliament elections in 2019

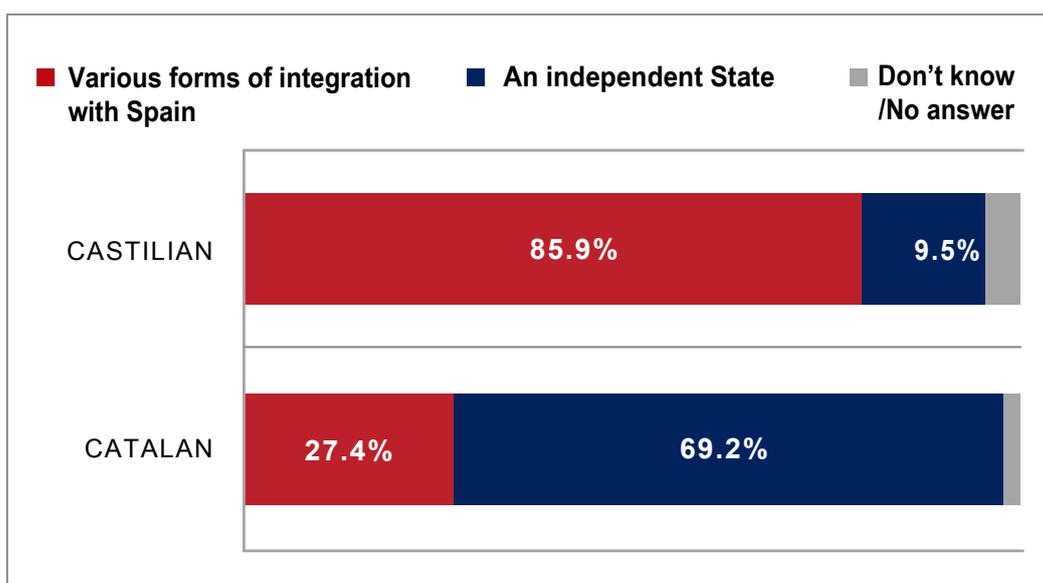
Self-perception of pro-European sentiment according to voting intention in the elections to the European Parliament								
								
Average	6.62	6.52	7.33	6.50	6.86	7.41	7.64 (*)	5.28 (*)
Weighted basis	1000	167	121	88	111	47	12	10
Real basis	1000	168	121	86	112	47	12	10

(*) Non-significant results

Source: Centro de Estudios de Opinión de la Generalitat de Catalunya (CEO), May 2019.

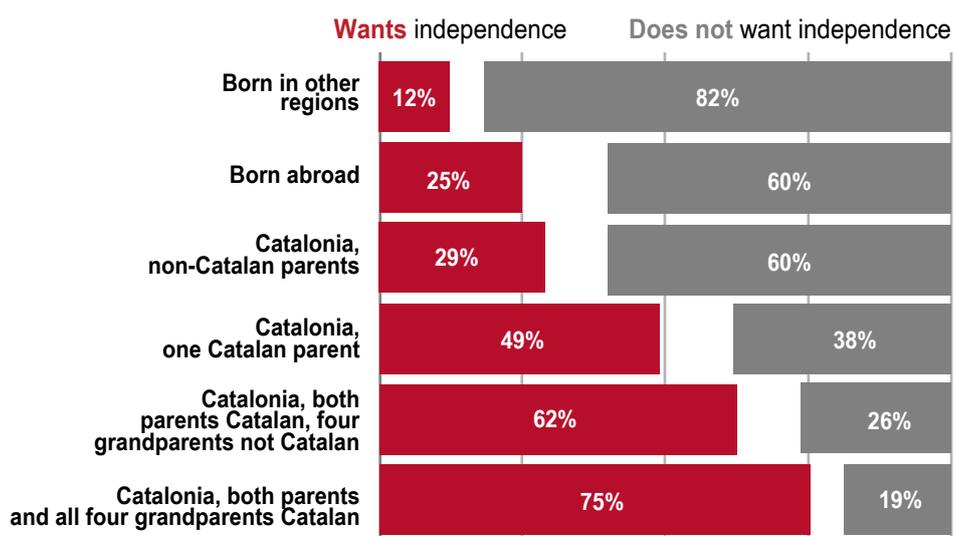
- b) The lack of conflict in Scottish national identity contrasts with the high potential for conflict among social groups in Catalonia, where the Catalan and Spanish national projects compete on the basis of fierce loyalties to language and identity. The progression of the increasingly radical process has slowly but steadily mobilised the non-nationalist sector of Catalan society.

Figure 20. Preferences of territorial models by first language



Source: CEO (2018).

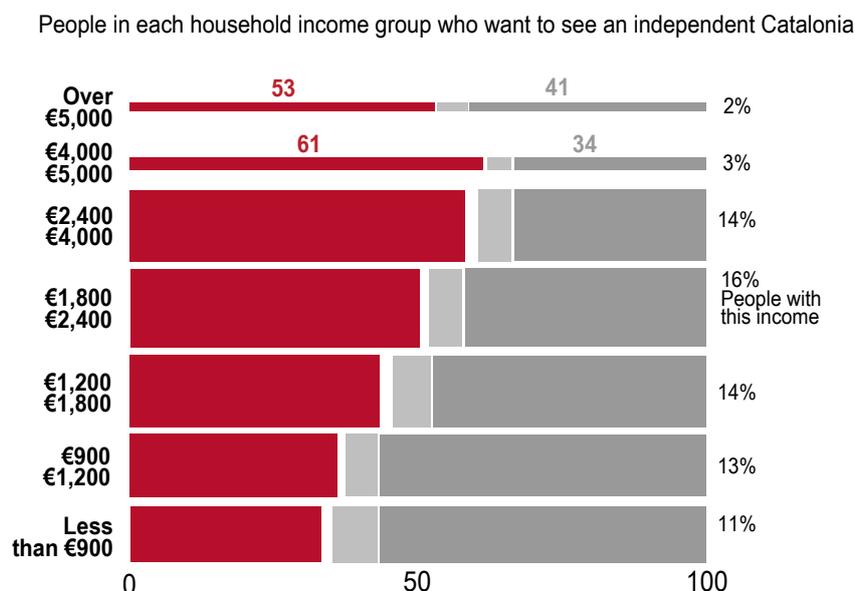
Figure 21. Opinions on independence by family origin



Source: CEO (2017).

c) A rebellion of the wealthy? In contrast to Scotland, which is less prosperous than the UK average and where the pro-independence movement has a strong working-class base, in addition to being one of the wealthiest parts of Spain, in Catalonia nationalism is strongest among those with the highest incomes. The appeals of its leaders to the enormous economic benefits that would accrue from breaking with Spain, by ceasing to be net contributors to the State budget, is fairly similar –even in literal terms– to some of the Brexit campaign slogans and can therefore be perceived to be selfish and contrary to solidarity.

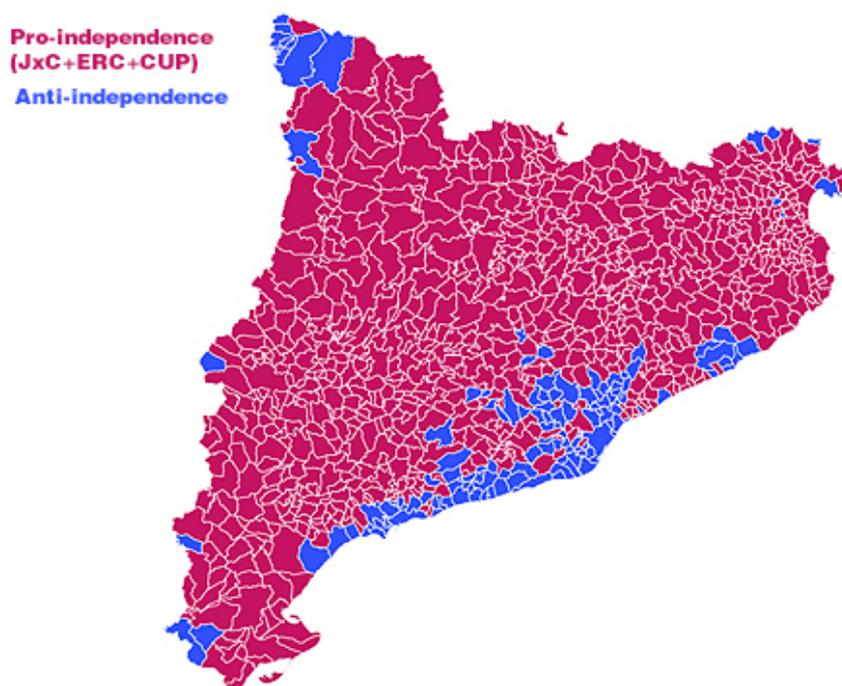
Figure 22. Relationship between income and independence



Source: CEO (7,500 responses from 2016 and 2017)

d) While Scottish independence has been more successful in large cities, the converse is true in Catalonia: there is a majority in favour of secession in rural areas and a majority against in cities, a dynamic that is closer to Brexit.

Figure 23. The pro-independence vote in rural and urban Catalonia

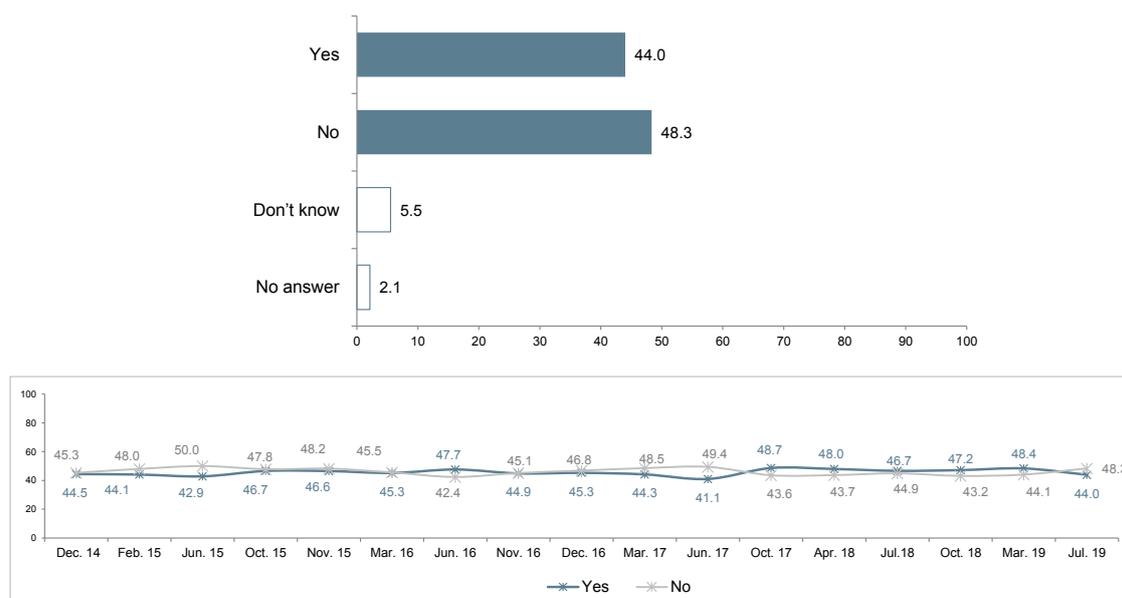


Source: ABC, with data from the latest regional elections of December 2017.

- The parallel occurrence of the conflict in Catalonia and the consequences of the Brexit referendum have also called into question the use of referendums as suitable instruments for resolving complex and divisive disputes.
- If using a referendum to gauge support for a problematic situation (as opposed to affirming solutions agreed with large majorities by the parties represented in parliament) has proved divisive in the case of Brexit, they are even more divisive when it comes to issues of identity in highly fractured societies. In similar cases, such as Belgium and Northern Ireland –where political divisions are based on fault lines that are deeply rooted in language and religion– they are seldom used. When this has been the case (eg, the Northern Ireland border poll in 1973), the experience has been traumatic, bringing to the fore and even increasing sectarian hostilities.
- Given the strong correlation between identity or linguistic preferences and views on independence, a referendum becomes a mechanism for a zero-sum decision in which a small –and probably unstable– majority imposes its preferences in a way that cannot be easily reversed. Divided societies require power-sharing agreements to manage conflicts.

- According to some polls, there is majority-support for a referendum agreed with the state (around 70%). However, this support does not necessarily indicate a strong preference but rather a desire to directly participate in politics.
- Recent polling also shows that the percentage of Catalans who favour a solution involving constitutional reform and enhanced self-rule instead of independence is around 70% and even has a majority among supporters of independence.
- Regardless, despite support for independence as the solution to the conflict being in the region of 35%-40% among Catalans, if a binary question is posed (yes or no to independence in a hypothetical referendum), the division is almost 50–50.

Figure 24. Support for independence based on a yes–no question



Source: Centro de Estudios de Opinión de la Generalitat de Catalunya (CEO), July 2019.

- The increase in the number of people in favour of secession when the question is simplified and the unstable and persistent stalemate between those in favour and those against (with opinion divided along almost sectarian lines depending on which party people vote for) means the wisdom of a referendum as a solution is even more questionable.

Figure 25. Support for independence by voting intention

		Intended vote in elections to the Congress of Deputies						
								
Yes	44.0	3.0	91.3	84.5	5.6	14.5	95.6	5.0
No	48.3	95.5	7.1	10.2	87.1	73.9	4.4	95.0
Don't Know	5.5	0.0	1.6	4.6	5.6	8.0	0.0	0.0
No answer	2.1	1.5	0.0	0.8	1.7	3.6	0.0	0.0
Base real	1500	66	127	393	233	138	68	20

Source: Centro de Estudios de Opinión de la Generalitat de Catalunya (CEO), July 2019.

6. Attempts to 'internationalise' the conflict

- Giving the territorial conflict an international dimension has become a clear goal of the Catalan independence strategy. This approach began by trying to show how easy it would be for an independent Catalonia to become a Member State of the EU.
- This aspiration was overshadowed by the parallel debates in Scotland: The slogan 'independence in Europe' has been widely used by the SNP and 'Catalonia, new European state' was the slogan of the large march in Barcelona on 11 September 2012, which represented the start of the independence process.
- However, while the Catalan and Scottish independence movements identify as pro-European, the integration process is an obstacle, since gaining independence means leaving the EU:

'If part of the territory of a Member State would cease to be part of that state because it were to become a new independent state, the Treaties would no longer apply to that territory. A new independent state would, by the fact of its independence, become a third country with respect to the EU and the Treaties would no longer apply on its territory' (President of the European Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso, 2012).

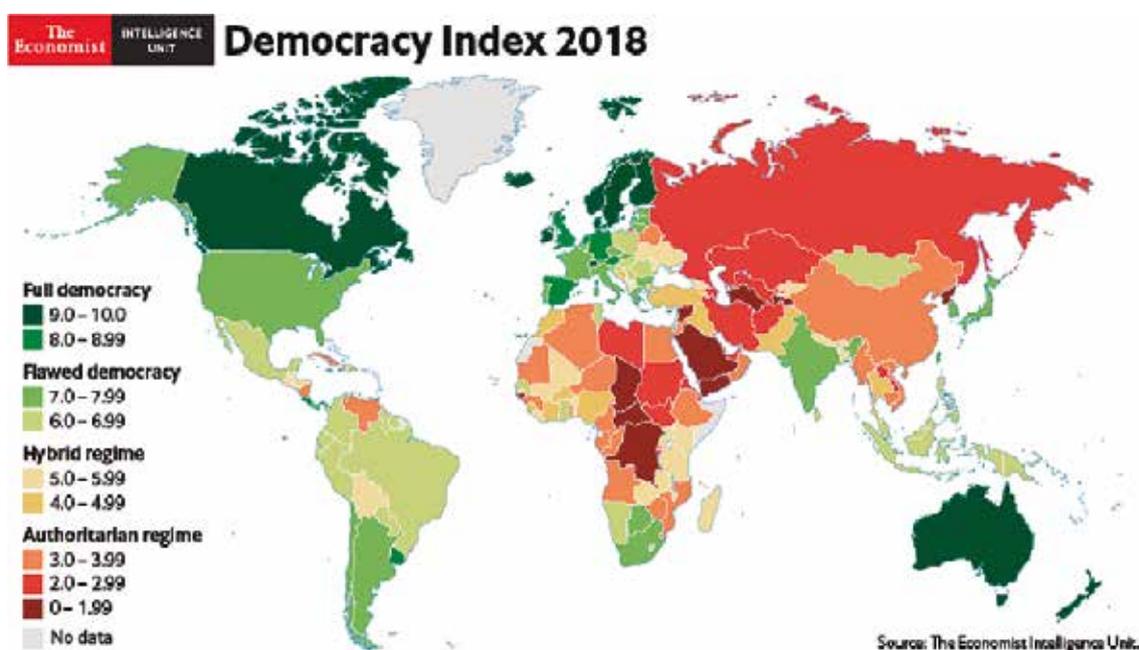
- The independence movement has proposed a number of solutions to circumvent the strict rules governing European enlargement, including conducting the negotiations to secure a position in the EU during the period between winning a referendum and the effective date of independence, such that there would be no need to leave and reapply.
- However, an agreement to allow readmission would depend on political willpower and unanimous ratification by all Member States. The required consensus is unlikely in the case of Scotland and impossible when it comes to Catalonia, given the unilateral nature of the independence process, a factor that would even impede the new state's recognition by the international community and, thus, the Member States of the EU.
- But the reasons against EU membership of break-away territories are not just related to legal impediments or the political resistance of countries such as Spain. Institutions and other Member States also want to avoid two types of risk:
 - a) The possibility of a domino effect in other regions, such as Flanders, northern Italy, Corsica and minorities in Hungary, which could destabilise Member States or result in a proliferation of states that renders the current model unworkable.

- b) Giving legitimacy to *de facto* situations in Eastern Europe, such as Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and the Crimea, and even inside the EU itself, in the case of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. It also has the potential to destabilise Bosnia-Herzegovina or Kosovo.
- However, there are also political and more general reasons, since European integration is an anti-nationalist project and would only be sympathetic to this type of process under exceptional circumstances. While this could have been possible for Scotland, it is not the case for Catalonia.
 - Realising the insurmountable obstacles to the effectiveness –or even credibility– of its plans for automatic readmission to the EU, the Catalan independence movement refocused its internationalisation strategy on seeking support for the cause of self-determination. Given that both the Spanish Parliament and the Constitutional Court had made it clear that Catalonia has no such right, the only alternative was to try to persuade external actors to pressure Madrid into allowing a referendum.
 - The logic behind this approach was occasionally idealistic: despite the international community's prevailing paradigm of defending territorial integrity, proponents of independence claim the EU and major powers should support Catalonia's 'democratic mandate'. However, on other occasions the arguments were more realistic: foreign governments and financial markets could not withstand a chaotic situation given the country's high level of public debt and the importance of the Catalan economy. Since autumn 2017, attempts have also been made to use the additional argument of the repression being suffered by Catalonia.
 - The Catalan independence process has not received any foreign support as a result of this new approach. All international leaders have expressly supported Spanish unity and respect for the Constitution. Moreover, it is highly unlikely their positions will change, given their strong reluctance to support or pragmatically accept a secession based on a unilateral process in the absence of a clear majority of pro-independence forces.
 - When it comes to a unilateral process, foreign support for Catalan independence is limited and almost non-existent. In October 2017, not one country recognised Catalonia's statehood following its unilateral declaration of independence. In fact, capitals and multilateral organisations (including, significantly, the EU institutions) were unanimous in their support for Spain's interpretation of its Constitution. Remedial secession and external mediation in the crisis were explicitly ruled out.
 - Further, in 2017 and 2018, Frans Timmermans, the Vice-President of the European Commission, who is responsible for defending the fundamental values of the EU, also clearly reiterated its position, stressing 'that the European Commission has no criticisms of the functioning of democracy in Spain, the separation of powers and the application of human rights', that it would not allow itself to be 'instrumentalised with

a domestic agenda that seeks to change the constitutional order of a Member State', and added that it is possible to 'protest and fight to change the law via democratic means but not violate or ignore it'.

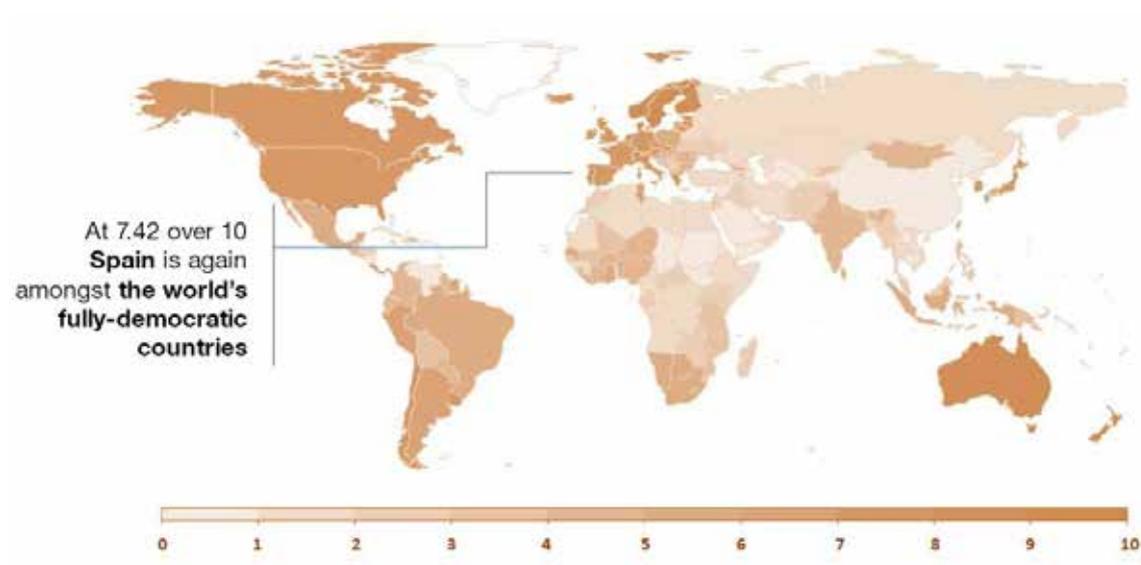
- Regardless, certain international media and parts of European public opinion (largely with leftist and nationalist tendencies) have occasionally expressed sympathy for the cause of Catalan independence. This was mainly seen after the use of force by the police on 1 October 2017 and the imprisonment of leaders.
- With the Scottish referendum in the past, the independence movement reoriented its internationalisation strategy once again, recurring to comparisons with Slovenia, Kosovo and Ukraine, despite the alarming circumstances (the existence of violence) and the clear differences in these cases.
- To ensure the credibility of this comparison, the independence movement launched a smear campaign criticising the quality of Spanish democracy. However, the claims were refuted by major comparative indexes.

Figure 26. The quality of Spanish democracy in the Democracy Index



Source: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019.

Figure 27. The quality of Spanish democracy in the V-DEM index



Source: V-Dem (2019), Infografía España Global.

7. Lessons learned and potential solutions

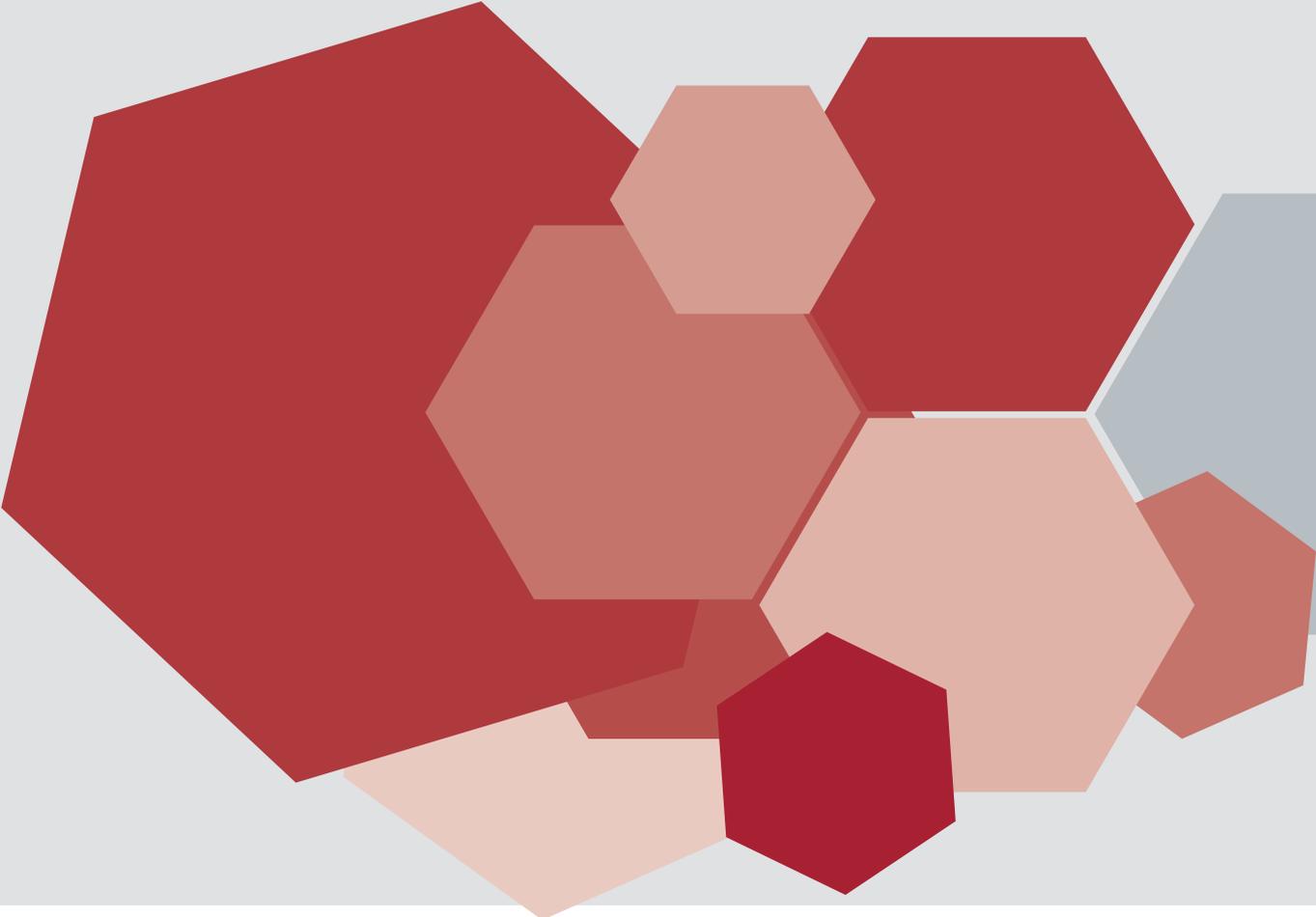
- Various conclusions can be drawn from the Catalan territorial conflict:
 - a) Catalan society is divided and polarised. The majority of people have a dual identity although a gap has opened up between those who feel only or mainly Catalan and those who identify as Spanish. Ethno-linguistic factors (main language and family origin) are the determining factors in this division, which runs the risk of creating two communities in conflict.
 - b) In this scenario, the independence movement has, to varying extents, failed to back down from conflict, while many upholders of the Constitution question the nationalist hegemony and would prefer to redefine the rules of the game in Catalonia, which they consider to be biased on account of factors such as education and the media.
 - c) There is no popular mandate for secession, much less if pursued unilaterally, with recent polls estimating that only 9% of Catalans support such a course of action. The biggest success to which the independence movement can aspire is reaching the threshold of 50% of the electorate, capitalising on any demobilisation of Catalans who wish to remain part of Spain. However, reaching this threshold will not change the essential aspects of the conflict or convince the population of Spain as a whole to allow its country to be broken up. Any sustainable solution to overcoming the territorial crisis that began in 2012 must be based on much broader support in Catalan society, which can only emerge if by accepting its internal plurality.
 - d) Spanish governments have also made mistakes, given the difficulty of accepting the consequences of not having a homogenous nation state. There is a certain reflex at the central level not to accept the internal pluralism inherent to the governments of the Generalitat. However, this pathology is not specific to Spain in general or Catalonia in particular: plural democracies are always complex.
 - e) Some reactions by state institutions, such as the use of police force on 1 October 2017 or holding pro-independence leaders in custody and seeking harsh sentences, may be hard to understand or are perceived as counter-productive by some foreign observers. However, halting a secession process promoted by public authorities and one that enjoys large-scale support is challenging, especially when it breaks the Constitution and jeopardises coexistence.
- What next? Although the political situation has reached an impasse, there are signs of a thaw in recent months. Nonetheless, the most hard-line leaders (including the former and current Catalan Premiers, Carles Puigdemont and Quim Torra) have refused to rule out another unilateral attempt, while the two largest parties (the left-wing ERC and the centre-right PdeCAT) have distanced themselves and now propose a more

gradualist strategy. There have also been crosscutting agreements at the local level that break the unity of pro-independence forces while at the same time moderate nationalist voices have grown.

- In the short term, a rapid de-escalation is unlikely although all the signs point to a tactical retreat of Catalan nationalism, backing away from implementing independence until there is sufficient support in society to allow it to achieve its objectives. This approach has echoes of nationalism in Quebec 20 years ago, although in this case the requisite conditions never arose.
- Can we expect a solution?
 - For now, the independence movement is not interested in negotiating enhanced self-rule and will only discuss self-determination and the acquittal of its leaders.
 - Regardless of its political orientation, profound constitutional and political reasons prevent the Spanish Government from negotiating a secession referendum or impunity for those facing trial.
 - In the medium term, however, it is possible that the independence movement realises the extraordinary difficulty of achieving its ultimate goals, given the social reality in Catalonia, the lack of international support for secession, the economic and social consequences of the conflict, and the loss of influence of Catalan nationalism in Spain. This may create the conditions for scaling back demands and the search for a broad internal agreement in Catalan society, as has been the case in other contexts, such as Quebec and the Basque Country.
 - The rest of Spain (its institutions, political forces and society) also needs time to come to terms with the traumatic events of autumn 2017. There is currently strong opposition to any constitutional negotiation that could be construed as pacification. The preferred approach is to emphasise to pro-independence forces the costs of a process that, like Brexit, was sold to the Catalan public as free from economic and social damage. However, it is likely that once the tensions have subsided, the conclusion is reached that the complexity of a country as heterogeneous as Spain and the significant objective importance of Catalonia within it requires efforts to bring more Catalans round to the constitutional consensus.
 - The possibility of a new territorial agreement that accommodates a significant part of the independence movement cannot be ruled out (see, for example, Figure 15, which shows the support among Catalans for different relationships with Spain). There is extremely limited margin for the transfer of new powers, given that the Generalitat already enjoys wide-ranging powers. However, there is room for movement when it comes to the ability of autonomous communities to influence the state institutions (eg, with the reform of the Senate or Constitutional Court) and certain symbolic issues, such as the use of local languages. It may also be possible

to provide greater resources and transparency for funding, while at the same time maintaining or even increasing inter-territorial redistribution of funds.

- Nonetheless, any solution for a new relationship with Spain (which will never be final due to the inherent instability of plural democracies) must be based on the acceptance of the principles of the rule of law and the internal plurality of Catalonia itself, accommodating the many Catalans (and a large majority of the Spanish public) who are against the institutions of self-rule being in the service of a national construction whose ultimate aim is secession. Federal loyalty and power-sharing agreements within Catalonia will be key to any solution.
- The challenge for Spain in a historic and comparative perspective is to show it still has its centuries-old capacity to reconcile territorial integrity with decentralisation and internal pluralism, in this case in a democratic context. Ambitious agreements can transform the severe territorial crisis of the last few years into an international model to help avoid other similar situations around the world. Catalonia and Spain as a whole have the potential and responsibility to become successful role models of wide-ranging self-government, of concord between complex national sentiments and of unity in diversity, thereby helping to channel similar conflicts of identity elsewhere. Ultimately, a world in which the questioning of plural states becomes widespread would not only jeopardise the feasibility of the status quo through a proliferation of national micro-interests but would also create major risks when it comes to internal coexistence, with citizens excluded in their own land due to the inability to accommodate multiple identities in the same country.



Príncipe de Vergara, 51
28006 Madrid (Spain)
www.realinstitutoelcano.org
www.blog.rielcano.org
www.globalpresence.realinstitutoelcano.org

