

A Grade: Round 2*That Spain should grant independence to Catalonia*Background

Numerous regions throughout Europe currently have movements advocating for independence, but few are as established and contentious as the current independence movement in Catalonia. Catalonia is one of the wealthiest regions in Spain, and is located in the Northeast on the border with France. Catalonia has regional government that is responsible for determining most of its laws and running its government programs, although the Spanish Government still has the final say over many matters (the situation is not unlike Scotland, where the British government allows Scotland to make its own laws in many areas like healthcare and education).

In October 2017 the Catalan Government decided to hold a referendum to allow the people a chance to decide if they wanted to remain part of Spain. The referendum was illegal (only the Spanish Government has the power to call referenda) and the Spanish Government attempted to break it up using the police. While the referendum voted overwhelmingly in favour of independence (90% in favour) only 43% of people cast a vote, suggesting that voters who supported remaining a part of Spain largely boycotted the referendum. Following the referendum the Catalan Government attempted to declare independence but they were dismissed by the Spanish Government, with elections for a new Catalan Government held in December 2017. Additionally, a number of Catalan politicians went into exile or were arrested by the Spanish Government.

Why Independence?

There has long been tension between the Spanish Government (based in Madrid) and the Catalan Government (based in Barcelona). As Catalonia is one of Spain's most prosperous regions, the Spanish Government takes far more from it in taxes than other regions and frequently spends that money in other parts of Spain. Additionally, Catalonia has its own distinct culture and sense of identity within Spain.

Better together

Independence comes with costs. Countries have to develop their own taxation systems, armed forces, international relations and other functions of government. There is little support within the European Union for recognising Catalonia as a separate country, which could cause difficulties if Catalonia were independent. Additionally, Catalonia has long been a part of Spain and integrated into its national identity.

Some questions to consider:

- What do the people of Catalonia want? Is allowing 'self-determination' an important principle?
- Would the European Union admit Catalonia as a separate country? Why/why not? Would admission to the European Union be important for Catalonia?
- How would the rest of Spain be impacted if Catalonia were to leave? Would this be fair?
- Are there other ways for the Spanish Government to offer more power or control to the people of Catalonia? Is this a better outcome than independence?

- What benefits would the people of Catalonia likely gain from independence? What about the costs? Are they worth it?
- Would granting independence to Catalonia impact any other independence movements? How so? Is this even an important consideration?
- How has the continued uncertainty impacted Spanish businesses? How would independence alter this?

Some articles to consider:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2017/oct/27/beyond-catalonia-pro-independence-movements-in-europe-map>
- <https://theconversation.com/catalonia-spain-and-the-economic-consequences-of-a-split-85557>
- <http://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/catalan-separatists-file-resolution-in-regional-parliament-declaring-independence-from>
- <https://www.britannica.com/place/Catalonia>
- <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/catalan-crisis-why-does-catalonia-want-independence-do-people-really-support-it-spain-latest-a8025836.html>
- <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/spain-catalan-independence-extra-police-funding-protests-madrid-catalonia-a8166611.html>
- <https://theconversation.com/even-if-separatist-parties-win-the-catalan-election-international-law-doesnt-provide-a-right-to-independence-86900>