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January 2018 Public Forum Topic Analysis and Research Guide

Resolved: Spain should grant Catalonia its independence

Presented by the Institute for Speech and Debate

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Reflecting on an Extensive History

Before we examine the question the resolution poses, I think it is important first to know the long history of Catalonia and its relationship with Spain. The first mention of Catalonia dates back to the 12th Century. During this period Catalonia was part of Aragon but retained its own parliament. It isn't until 1469, with the marriage of Ferdinand I of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile, that the Kingdom of Spain begins. In the 1600s during the Reapers' War, Catalonia revolted against the Spanish King's taxation policies and was declared a republic under French protection for a short period before coming under Spanish rule again ("Catalonia profile"). Despite being under Spanish rule, Catalonia still remained relatively autonomous.

In 1714 the War of Spanish Succession is where Catalonia lost much of its autonomy. Catalonia supported the rivals to the Spanish throne during the war, but the external armies assisting in the war eventually deserted them in the battles and Spain won. Spain abolished all of Catalonia's political institutions, public use of the Catalan language was prohibited, and a Spanish central government rule was imposed on the Catalan people (Hargreaves 19). Catalonia would eventually work to revive its culture and language in the early 1900s, only to be suppressed under General Franco's dictatorship ("Catalonia profile"). During this period, Franco pursued a unified Spain which included cleansing the country of dissenters and thousands of Catalan activists were executed or forced into exile (Erickson October 27 2017).

When Franco died, there was a movement to restore autonomy to regions like Catalonia, but this was met with resistance from more conservative member of the Spanish government. The compromise that ensured was the creation of the 1978 Spanish Constitution, which allowed for 17 self-governing regions that were overseen by and worked with the central Spanish government. Article 155 was written into the Constitution as a check the central government could use on these regional governments (Erickson October 27 2017). While the establishment of these regional governments allow some autonomy for places demanding it, like Catalonia, critics say that this structure set Spain up for an unwieldy system that would be difficult to manage ("Outrage in Catalonia" 54).

Understanding the Current Situation

Over the next several decades, the region would grow and prosper under the decentralized power structure. Spain as a whole saw its per person income double and has joined the European Union ("The man who wasn't").

Despite the success of Spain as a nation, within the past 15 years there has been a shift in the Catalan government, with a focus on achieving greater autonomy within the framework of the larger nation of Spain. I think it is important to distinguish this difference because it was not until recently that there was a focus on absolute independence (Barnes).

In 2006, Catalonia's autonomy statute came into full force, which used the term "nation" which came under challenge by the People's Party (Ahmad). Four years later the Spanish constitutional court ruled that there was no legal basis for the central Spanish government to recognize Catalonia as an independent nation (Child and Mitchell). This legal ruling sparked protests across the Catalan people with marches in Madrid and declarations like "We are a nation. We decide." (Ahmad).

A referendum was again voted on this year and out of 5.3 million citizens in Catalonia approximately 2.2 million voted, with 90 percent of those voting affirming (Donadio). Following the election, the Prime Minister of Spain invoked Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution and announced a regional election in Catalonia to take place on December 21 ("The man who wasn't"). Article 155, once invoked, is just two short paragraphs that gave the Spanish central government the right to give direct orders to all authorities in the regional government ("Constitution"). This prevents a regional government from undermining the interests of the larger nation of Spain. It is a relatively drastic move that allows the central government to use all "necessary means" to force regional governments to comply with direct orders from Madrid (Erickson October 27 2017). The Catalan government was fired and the commander in chief for the Catalan police was replaced ("The man who wasn't").

By invoking Article 155, the Spanish Prime Minister has broken down a government structure that has been in place since 1978 with its 17 self-governing regions. During the past several months there have been reports of violence between police and protesters, although some of it has been uncovered to be fake news (Erickson October 19 2017), as propaganda is pushed from all sides. In some other regions of Spain, towns have had sendoff parades, wishing the police officers luck as they head to Catalonia, while in other regions Spaniards are ashamed that Article 155 had to be invoked and felt there were less drastic measures that could have been taken (Frayser).

While all of this turmoil has been occurring internally, the European Union has opted to stay out of the fray, announcing its official position that this is an internal issue for Spain. The pro-independence movement has contested this position, continuing to call for an EU mediator to help settle the dispute (Brinded).

Something important to keep an eye on will be the December 21st elections. While this will not include the referendum for independence, it will be an indicator on where the public stands on the issue (Donadio). If the pro-independence movement wins a majority, this could help vindicate their cause, sending a message to the international community as well as businesses who have fled Catalonia in the wake of the referendum (more on that further in this paper) ("Catalonia's bid for independence"). Thus I would encourage debaters to keep a close eye on the weeks leading up to and after the election to further develop your arguments. Will the pro-

independence parties get the majority of votes? And if they don't, what will happen next for the movement? All of this happens before January commences!

Examining the Resolution

When examining the resolution for debate, I think it is important to look at some particular choices in the wording. The resolution, on face, appears relatively straightforward, short and to the point. However, in affirming the specific words of the resolution, there are some areas excluded from affirmative ground.

First, the resolution does not make any mention of referendum, election, or democratic vote. And remember the Spanish Constitution does not allow for secession. Thus, I would contend the granting of independence by Spain does not necessarily stem from the voice of the Catalan people. I would be wary of claiming ground such as popular vote on the Pro, as I do think you unnecessarily open yourself up to more negative arguments specific to popular referendums.

The term independence is another unique choice by the wording committee, as it also excludes many of the popular suggestions to solving the Catalan-Spain dispute, such as a dual-federalist state. While Pro teams may have luck defending that an increase in independence is affirming the resolution, I would contend that the statement itself is absolutist in its framing. Thus I would suggest that Pro teams must be ready to defend Catalonia as an independent nation-state. I do agree that this may be difficult as there is far less literature supporting this solution in its immediacy. However, I think with some creativity (for example a slow transition as no timeframe is specified), Pro teams should be able to find adequate ground to win debates. Con teams may want to examine variations of government structure that are excluded from Pro ground as alternative solutions, possible solutions like a plurinational federation (Lopez), that might be removed from the decision making process if Catalonia is granted outright independence. While I don't necessarily advocate the use of counter advocacies as a means of proving the negation of the resolution, I do think it is crucial in understanding the complexity of government structures when examining a drastic shift such as the severing of a region from a larger nation-state.

From the Pro Perspective

“Spain is a backpack that is too heavy for us to keep carrying. It's costing us our development,” said the spokesman for Catalan President Artur Mas, Joan Maria Pique (Wheatley).

While many of the leaders of the pro-independence movement are currently living in jail or exile, this has actually become an important factor in current events as Catalans see these leaders as martyrs for a higher cause (Donadio). The treatment of Catalans by the government and the police is fueling a push for independence while highlighting the divisions that have existed for centuries, even when the nation appeared united like when Spain hosted the Olympics in Barcelona (Hargreaves).

One important component of the push for independence has been the preservation of the language and culture of Catalonia. As mentioned earlier in the paper, this revival began decades ago and for more than 30 years, the education system in Catalonia has been “nation-building” through its textbooks and media (Donadio). Catalan as a language is one of the most widely used regional languages in Europe despite the controversies over its promotion and use (Bell). However Spain continues to insist on a national language, to the detriment of the Catalan culture.

The struggle between the nationalist movement within Spain and the independence movement in Catalonia can be likened to a struggle between two ethnic populations where one is seeking control of another (Ahmad 73-74). When the Spanish Supreme Court ruled that the “Catalan language should not take precedence over Castilian,” over one million people hits the streets in protest (Ahmad 80), a clear indicator that protection of language and culture is important to the people of Catalan. A Pro team could flush this argument out further to impact why an independent Catalonia would allow for this language and culture to flourish.

Another concern the Pro should articulate is the authoritarian state that occurred following the referendum when the Spanish government reportedly arrested political opponents and put controls on the media and Internet in the region (Tharoor). One could argue that Catalonia is being treated like an enemy state and the only way to improve the situation for all would be an independent Catalonia. In a democracy, problems must be solved through diplomatic means and not through threats and punishments (Lopez).

While the resolution does not call for a legal referendum, a Pro team could argue that this would be the best method for Spain to grant Catalonia its independence. This would rest on having evidence ensuring the independence movement would win though (otherwise you aren't affirming the resolution!). The illegal referendums that have occurred in Catalonia would suggest a measure of predictability based on political party affiliation ((Munoz and Guinjoan 63) and thus depending on the December 21st elections, you may be able to find literature to support this claim. A legal referendum would allow Pro to access arguments of representation and democracy, looking to philosophers who were cited in justifying America's breakaway from England.

A legal referendum, or some other legal method of justifying the disunion, would also solve for much of the debate within greater Spain as the continuing justifications for denying independence has been legal reasons (Lopez). This is important because a Pro team cannot just focus on the needs of Catalonia in order to win the debate. I would contend there needs to be some semblance of approval (outside of forced-fiat) within Spain as well. Pro teams may opt to read through Catalan novels and watch Catalan films which imagine how this independence will be gained - while fictional, many imagine the Spanish parliament voting followed by a referendum to confirm popular support (Cramer 131-132).

Another foundational area of arguments the Pro team can develop are in the economic realm. Economic justifications have been a large player in the movement for a total breakaway from Spain, as pro-independence activists contend there is a lack of equity for Catalans within the

current system. This system involves a wealth redistribution system where the wealthier of the 17 regions in Spain send part of their revenue to poorer regions and Catalonia has consistently been a region sending money to Madrid to be sent to other parts of Spain (Barnes).

Catalonia accounts for approximately one-fifths of Spain's GDP (Benavides), paying 15 billion Euros more to the central government than it receives from Madrid (Ahmad). While many federalist systems operate under this manner (including the European Union), it often breeds discontent within the wealthier entities (like German taxpayers angered over bailing out Greece) (Barnes). Catalans resent sending money to other parts of the country, and this resentment was fueled by the 2008 economic crisis, increasing pro-independence support (Benavides). Frustrations continued when Madrid withheld investment funds during this crisis, and Catalans argued it was a misuse of power by the central government (Wheatley).

Catalonia leaders contend (as can the Pro team) that the limitations placed by Madrid have hindered the development of Catalonia's economy. High taxes and low levels of investment by the central government of Spain are a burden that are lifted when Catalonia is granted its independence. Researchers contend that with even a one-third reduction in Catalonia's fiscal imbalance over the past 25 years it could have been a major contender in the global marketplace (Desquens). Additionally, it is probably much of these resources could be concentrated on social services for the people of Catalonia which would improve the lives of Catalans, another possible argument to develop within the Pro case ("The Catalan").

The independence movement has several important components in play as pro-independence leaders need to not just win support from the central Spanish government, but also the people of Catalonia where multiple factions exist, each with different views of what independence will look like (Nelson and Petzinger). It will be up to the Pro to show both the people in Catalonia as well as the Spanish government will be pacified if the resolution is affirmed.

From the Con Perspective

"It's false that the right to vote can be assigned unilaterally to one region about a matter that affects all Spaniards", the Spanish Prime Minister said in a statement. "It's profoundly anti-democratic." ("The Catalan").

As I mentioned within analysis for the Pro, I believe a burden many Con teams will place will be that the Pro must prove this separation is not only beneficial for Catalonia, but also for the other Spanish citizens. Otherwise I think it will be difficult for many Pro teams to win with a generalized cost-benefit framework. With this in mind, Con teams should be prepared for creative frameworks from the Pro that attempt to short-circuit this burden.

Additionally, the Con should place a burden on the Pro team proving independence is the best solution for this dispute, as I would contend it is a drastic and irreversible one. It is feasible, and perhaps more desirable, to seek a solution within the current framework of the Spanish government. Increased federalism could potentially renew trust between Catalonia and Madrid and by updating the Spanish Constitution, this could be achieved without severing Catalonia

from Spain ("The man who wasn't"). This recognition of autonomy while also promoting the benefits of remaining a part of Spain could alleviate much of the conflict between Catalans and Spain (Cramer 149). As Spain has transitioned to a democracy and entered the European Union, there was a need to update the Constitution, something that could be done in cooperation between regional governments and the central government to renew trust (Brinded).

One of the assumptions many Pro arguments rest on is Catalonia's entry into the European Union. In fact, much of the support of Catalans also rests on this assumption (Ahmad). But the European Union has been very clear that an independent Catalonia would not be a member ("Spain economy"). And this has led to concerns by banks located within Catalonia, some of whom relocated following the October vote (Frayer) and other businesses threatening to relocate as well ("Empresarios alertan"). Tourism and consumer confidence also fell after the October 1st vote which are further indicators of the stability of Pro economic arguments ("The man who wasn't"). The timeframe of Catalan independence is an important question for both sides of the debate, as many questions exist about the public and business support for this split and the ability for Catalonia to survive ("Spain economy").

Another argument that Con teams should develop would be looking to the strength of support of the pro-independence movement within Catalonia. Many Catalans do not support independence, feeling disillusioned with politics (Llana) and divided amongst political and also economic lines ("The man who wasn't"). Thus a double-fracturing is possible with the fracturing from Spain but then also a fracturing within Catalonia (Tharoor). This leads to Con arguments that should be developed on the preparedness of Catalonia, something most experts would agree is not where it needs to be for Catalonia to be a successful nation (Donadio) including the Catalan government ("The man who wasn't").

In conclusion, I think this will be a topic that will be constantly evolving on the surface, but will not truly change in a larger context over the course of January. Pro teams will need to be uniquely creative to establish arguments that most scholars contend isn't an immediate possibility and Con teams will need to be prepared for those unique frameworks and claims. Both sides should examine validity of evidence in light of propaganda by both sides.

One possible argument that could be developed to benefit either side of the debate is looking to more global impacts established by Spain granting Catalonia independence absent wars or international ultimatums. The impact of severing Catalonia will undoubtedly also have implications on the cohesion of the European Union, potentially leading to a balkanization of Europe ("The Catalan"). It could also lead to the European Union moving from nation-states to regions (Donadio) which could have its own implications on the global economy. While these two arguments may be more of a reach, remember the resolution is asking for quite a reach itself which would set a unique standard for countries facing internal conflict from minority populations.

Best of luck in January!

****Note from the authors: Many of these articles can be used on both sides of this topic as much of the literature examines the debate around independence. We have may have referenced specific articles on one side or another, but please be responsible with how you acknowledge author's intent, etc.****

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