

Catalan support for the Spanish football team does not illustrate a ‘dual identity’

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The question of identity in Catalonia and Spain is contentious and reflects the polarised political climate between Madrid and Barcelona. [Jordi Mas](#) writes on the notion that support for the Spanish national football team in Catalonia demonstrates that Catalan and Spanish identities are not necessarily incompatible. He argues that mere support for a football team does not constitute identity, and that the dynamics would shift if Catalonia had its own international side.



A [recent opinion poll](#) in Catalonia showed that, in a referendum on independence, 54.7 per cent of people would vote in favour and 22.1 per cent would vote against. Voting projections also suggest that national moderate parties will lose political support in the Catalan Parliament at the next elections. One might think that such a landscape does not fit with Alejandro Quiroga’s analysis in a [recent article](#) on the ‘dual’ Catalan and Spanish identities in Catalonia.

Quiroga’s perspective, drawing on anecdotal evidence, is that support for the Spanish national football team in Catalonia illustrates this dual identity, but can the current centrifugal forces in the political arena make their way into symbols in this way? Despite the fact that for some people Catalan and Spanish identities are not incompatible, his argument is nevertheless based on an [ecological fallacy](#).

He argues that the Euro 2012 final attracted a 75 per cent audience share in Catalonia and thousands of supporters went to the streets to celebrate the Spanish victory. As he [writes](#): “street parties, a profuse display of Spanish emblems, patriotic chants and balconies adorned with Spanish and Catalan flags made it clear that many Catalans strongly identified with the Spanish *selección*”. In this context, it is important to note that the Catalan flag (four red stripes and yellow background) is used both for regional identity and for independence movements, while the Catalan independence flag (which includes a white/red star in a blue/yellow triangle) is only used for independence movements.



Credit: PhyreWorX (CC-BY-SA-3.0)

Instead, one might consider a long list of alternative and possibly more meaningful explanations for Catalans watching the match. They could have been supporting Italy, simply watching an important football match or even (most likely half-heartedly) supporting the Spanish national team as a second best (since the Catalan team is explicitly forbidden from playing in international competitions). In this last scenario, Catalans would have been taking a pragmatic and strategic attitude towards Spain, which if anything reveals their lack of Spanish patriotism.

Quiroga discounts Catalan diversity and, as shown below, this point cannot be generalised. Indeed, if we look at evidence from other countries, we can see that drawing such conclusions leads to false results. In Germany, ZDF’s broadcast of the final achieved [record ratings](#) for a non-German match: 20.31 million, accounting for 56.2 per cent of the audience share. If Quiroga’s assertion were correct, we could conclude that more than half of all Germans feel a

dual identity. However, it would be inaccurate for us to say that all the bars in Berlin were full of Italian supporters.

Alternative explanations include: some viewers in Germany were actually Italian and others only supported Italy because they had some sympathy for them. Others still merely liked football or even others simply did not have an interest in football, but were watching the game anyway because their alternative would have been to stay at home alone. Moreover, if one saw Germans wearing Spanish shirts, one would not be able to determine their actual connection to Spain or presume that they had a double identity.

Let us now turn to Quiroga's other argument. Indeed, it is true that after the final whistle thousands of people in Catalonia went to the streets to celebrate the great victory. That day, I was watching the game in Munich, where bars were full and many people had Italian and Spanish flags, and where a not insignificant number of Spain supporters (not necessarily Spanish) were celebrating the success of their team in the streets.

At that time, I was living in Prague, where I could watch most of the Euro games, some of them on the big screen installed in *Staroměstské náměstí* (Old Town Square). Every evening the square was crowded with supporters, especially when the Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, England or Italy were playing. It would have been unusual if any social scientist had come up with the idea of a quintuple identity of Czech society.

In Andorra, the Portuguese community accounts for 16.3 per cent of the [population](#). Every time Portugal wins a game in an important competition, the streets of the Andorran capital are a place for celebration. The enormous and relative presence of supporters celebrating Portugal victories in the streets alone cannot be used as evidence that Andorrans feel an affinity for Portugal. The Andorran population is diverse, as is the Catalan population. Nearly 20 per cent of people living in Catalonia were born in the rest of Spain, and approximately half of the population has a mother or father who was born in the rest of Spain.

Although I admit that some Catalans share the dual identity that Quiroga describes, assertions such as “many Catalans strongly identified with the Spanish *selección*” or “popular support showed in Catalonia for the Spanish national team” cannot be accurately determined by audience figures or celebrations of Spanish supporters in the street.

We can shed some light on the matter with two surveys done in Catalonia in 2008 and 2012. These surveys do not capture the last political events in Catalonia, like the human chain, the massive demonstration of September 2012, or the political shift towards a separatist process. However, they do reflect Spanish success in football competitions, as the last survey was conducted after Spain won its second Euro.

According to these surveys, around 65 per cent of people in Catalonia support a Catalan national team, while around 20 per cent are opposed. At the same time, around 65 per cent of people said they support the Spanish team when it plays in a major competition and around 25 per cent said they do not. Assuming that both variables may overlap into two extremes of a continuum, around 25 per cent would not support the Catalan team, around 30 per cent would not support the Spanish team and around 5-10 percent would not know or would not answer. This would leave less than 40 percent remaining. According to this approach, 30-40 per cent of the Catalan population holds this dual identity.

However, further data from the surveys might lead us to believe that the percentage of dual supporters is even lower. When people in Catalonia were asked in Periodico's 2008 [survey](#) about the reasons for supporting the Spanish team, 33.5 per cent said it was because of their beautiful way of playing, 26.3 per cent because of the players themselves, 18.9 per cent because of the Catalan players and only 10 per cent because the team represents their country.

In the 2012 [survey](#), 33.7 per cent of people in Catalonia said they supported Spain because of the Catalan players and 10.8 per cent because there is no Catalan team, but if there was one they would support Catalonia. On this basis, one might conclude that there is little evidence that supporting the Spanish team symbolises the dual identity

of Catalans. If anything, survey data suggests that, if Catalonia had its own international team, support for Spain would be minimal.

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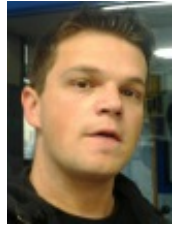
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