

## Catalonia: The end of the independence road?



With the Spanish government now implementing direct rule of Catalonia from Madrid, despite the Catalan parliament making a declaration of independence, what lies ahead for both Catalonia and Spain? [Luis Moreno](#) explains that the results of the new Catalan elections that have been proposed for 21 December could be key to determining the outcome of the crisis, but other factors such as the response of the pro-independence parties, or the potential for a major constitutional reform, will also be crucial in the weeks and months ahead.



Crowd on 27 October after the declaration of independence, Credit: [Assemblea.cat / Joan Morejón](#) (CC BY-NC 2.0)

With the constitutional sanctioning of the Upper House, the Spanish central government has implemented measures to take control of key self-rule institutions in Catalonia. Under Art. 155 of the 1978 Constitution, Rajoy's Government is set to replace Catalonia's ministers (*consellers*) by direct rule from Madrid. In addition, the President of the Generalitat, Carles Puigdemont, is to be removed from public office, although he has publicly declared that he is not prepared to step down.

All things considered, the most politically relevant decision taken by the Rajoy Government has been to go ahead with snap elections in Catalonia. These will be held as soon as 21 December. Such a move has taken by relative surprise the secessionist parties in the old Spanish Principality (*Principat de Catalunya*), as they now face the democratic counterargument of fresh elections supported by non-independence political forces in Catalonia and Spain as a whole.

In fact, Puigdemont had been pressed internally by some representatives of the secessionist bloc which supports him to take the initiative of calling for new elections. This move was not however supported by the anti-capitalist and anti-EU party CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy), a small but quantitatively decisive part of the pro-independence bloc. Now the situation has been reversed by the decision of the central government, a political initiative which is supported by a majority of Catalans themselves according to the latest polls.

Some of my colleagues in Scottish academia have reacted to these developments by presuming that direct rule and new elections will be likely to produce an increased pro-independence vote. This is not crystal-clear by any means. In fact, some non-secessionist parties trust that the mobilisation of their 'lost' voters of the past could now turn Catalonia's electoral map around. A new poll has indicated that the parties of the secessionist bloc would collect no more than 65 deputies and, therefore, fall short of a majority in the 135-seat Catalan chamber.

Until the holding of the Catalan elections on 21 December, events might develop in various and unexpected directions. It could well be that Puigdemont calls new elections himself based upon the claim that he is still the legitimate President, or that the secessionist forces would not recognise the validity of the elections called by the central government. Scenarios may occur according to the electoral expectations of the various parties now present in Catalonia's parliament (seven coalitions or parties).

Certainly, the road toward independence would come to an end if the non-secessionist parties and coalitions carry the day on 21 December. Alternatively, a renewed pro-independence vote would make it almost inevitable that a new popular referendum will take place in the not-too-distant future. On the other hand, a substantial reform of Spain's constitutional order could lead to the implementation of some form of 'devo max'.

Among other issues to be dealt with in such a scenario, the main problem would be to agree on a financial arrangement which would allow Catalonia to have the same 'fiscal independence' that the Basque Country currently enjoys, one of the three 'historical nationalities' together with Galicia. Such an arrangement allows for a much higher degree of public resources in comparison to the Basque Country (whose economy represents 6% of Spain's GDP, as compared to Catalonia's 19%).

To be continued...

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics.*

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## About the author



**Luis Moreno** – *Instituto de Políticas y Bienes públicos (CSIC)*

Luis Moreno is Research Professor at the Institute of Public Goods and Policies (IPP) within the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC).