

On Catalonia's Referendum

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Some people in Catalonia, a rich and culturally distinct area in north-east of Spain, [want to secede](#) from the larger country. According to [polls](#) (pdf) less than half of the people in the area support the move. The local government prepared for a referendum and called for a local vote.

Polling stations were set up for today. But Spanish laws do not allow for such polls or a separation. Catalonia, like other Spanish regions, already has a good degree of autonomy. If Catalonia were to secede the Basque areas in the north would likely follow. Spain would fall apart. Under Spanish law the referendum is illegal. The central government sent police to prevent the procedure. Street melees ensued.

A lot of mistakes have been made by the central government. It was stubborn in negotiations. It reacted too late to – at least partially – reasonable demands. Its insensitivity only incited resistance to it. But it is also responsible for the country as a whole. The behavior of local government is not much better. It is just as conservative, in its own way, as the government in Madrid.

Catalonia has a GDP per capita of some \$33,580/year. For Spain as a whole the GDP per capita is \$26,643/year. Many factors account for the difference. Catalonia has advantages in climate, in the vicinity of the French border, the high attractiveness for tourists with its capital Barcelona and its beaches. It has a well developed industry. But the “rest of Spain” is also, by far, its biggest market.

A richer part of the country does not want to subsidize the poorer ones. But it still wants to profit from them.

In general the splitting off of sub-states from the bigger, established nations weakens both. It is easier for outside forces to manipulate smaller states than larger ones. While the motives in this or that case are understandable, they are also, in my view, shortsighted.

During the Spanish civil war in the 1930s Catalonia and Basque areas were the last Republican strongholds against the winning right-wing Nationalists. That history lives on in today's conflict. No one should wish to repeat it.

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