The Island of Misfit Toys: Additional Arguments Against Autonomy

By Nick Robison

***Resolved: Spain should grant Catalonia its independence.***

Since Mitchell covered most of the CON ground in his last piece, today’s release contains supplementary materials. Note that all scripts are simply suggestions. I heartily recommend that you state everything in your own words. Also there are many ways to articulate mutual exclusivity when discussing Counterplans. Feel free to use something else. Remember that counterplans are opportunity-cost disadvantages—the reason that they are effective is that they show that voting for the resolution passes up a better opportunity or set of opportunities.

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The Island of Misfit Toys: Additional Arguments Against Autonomy

Contention 1: Independence is a political ploy, not a comprehensive policy proposition

Catalan’s Government not Prepared

Sebastiaan Faber and Bécquer Seguín 2017. (Faber is a professor of Hispanic studies at Oberlin College and author of Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War: History, Fiction, Photography. Seguín is an assistant professor of Iberian studies at Johns Hopkins University.) The Nation, 24 Nov 2017 “Spain’s Conflict Over Catalonia Is Covering Up Massive Political Corruption” <https://www.thenation.com/article/spains-conflict-over-catalonia-is-covering-up-massive-political-corruption/>

The divisive effects of the recent escalation have been most devastating in Catalonia itself, which in two months’ time has seen a massive influx of Spanish police, a corporate exodus, half a dozen mass demonstrations—both for and against independence—and two general strikes. Although many Catalans would like to remain part of Spain, support for an independent republic is strong among nearly half of the population. An overwhelming four-fifths’ majority supports the right to self-determination. Yet the politicians who claimed to guide Catalonia toward a bright, independent future turned out to have no actual plan in place. For the journalist Guillem Martínez, this was obvious from the beginning. In his view, the “road map toward independence” that the Catalan government has brandished since 2012 was little more than an opportunistic ploy, part of an elaborate game to shore up electoral support, force Madrid to allow Catalonia more fiscal autonomy, and hide the dirty laundry of President Puigdemont’s party, which has rebranded itself as the Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT). Even the culminating parliamentary vote on October 27, it turns out, was not quite a declaration of independence but a nonbinding proposition urging the Catalan government to proclaim the republic, which it never actually did.

Independence Hubbub Covers Corruption

Sebastiaan Faber and Bécquer Seguín 2017. (Faber is a professor of Hispanic studies at Oberlin College and author of Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War: History, Fiction, Photography. Seguín is an assistant professor of Iberian studies at Johns Hopkins University.) The Nation, 24 Nov 2017 “Spain’s Conflict Over Catalonia Is Covering Up Massive Political Corruption” <https://www.thenation.com/article/spains-conflict-over-catalonia-is-covering-up-massive-political-corruption/>

Just as the Catalan crisis has served to distract from PP corruption, it has also given the Catalan right an opportunity to whitewash its own image. Behind a cloak of martyrdom, Puigdemont and his party have blurred the memory of their own corruption scandals—also based on systematic illegal commissions in exchange for major contracts. And, today, many no longer remember their implementation of harsh austerity measures in the wake of the Great Recession and the violent repression of citizen protests that followed. “The conflict with Madrid has helped improve the image of the Catalan right,” the journalist Emilio Silva told us. “In the speech he gave after Rajoy fired him as president, Puigdemont spoke of a Catalan Republic whose citizens would live in equality, liberty, and fraternity. Well, that’s the same Puigdemont who, as mayor of the city of Girona, put padlocks on supermarket dumpsters to prevent those who had no other resources from taking food from them.”

Impact 1: No solvency, just power plays

Impact 2: Masking Disadvantage

By passing the resolution or whatever plan the PRO team has offered, the crisis necessarily becomes more visible still. This papers over Spain’s pervasive government corruption. With less popular attention, change becomes more difficult, leading to more corruption.

Contention 2: Consult Counterplan

If it is true that Catalonia’s independence would be good, then we ought to make it happen. But first we ought to double check to make sure that this is what people actually *want*. After all, there has never been a legal referendum on the subject.

**Mandate 1:** The Spanish Government and any other necessary agents will amend Spain’s constitution to allow the Spanish Government to grant independence to an autonomous region, contingent on a legal referendum by a majority of the people in the region.  
**Mandate 2:** Administer such a referendum to Catalonia.

**Mandate 3:** Grant independence to Catalonia as specified by the proposition team if the majority votes for independence.

**Timeline:** As soon as possible.

**Funding:** Whatever the affirmative specifies (as long as it’s reasonable.)

**Agency/Enforcement:** Whatever the affirmative specifies (as long as it’s reasonable.)

**Competitiveness:** The resolution reads **“*Spain should grant Catalonia its independence.”*** The affirmative team has to prove that Spain ought to make Catalonia independent. Suggesting that that independence should be contingent on some future event—in this case a referendum—makes the CON plan mutually exclusive with the resolution. After all, the CON plan affirms something more along the lines of “Spain might want to grant Catalonia its independence.”

So to affirm the resolution, the affirmative team needs to prove that some course of action (or set of possible courses of action, if they run it whole res) that *guarantees the end result of Catalonian independence* would be a good idea. Since the CON plan does not stipulate independence, and since plans that affirm the resolution have to specify that Catalonia becomes independent, the CON plan does not affirm the resolution.

Thus, if the CON plan is a good idea, the resolution is false.

Contention 3: Minor Repair—Restore Autonomy

In this argument, you would run last week’s release as a counterplan. To do so, you would define “independence” as “becoming a separate country” if you are speaking first. If the PRO team doesn’t define the resolution this way, you probably don’t want to run this argument. Once that’s established, basically run all of the relevant content from The Case For Decentralization.

Your competitiveness argument is that the resolution requires the proposition team to demonstrate that Spain should make Catalonia a separate country, and therefore your plan affirms a different course of action. Catalonia cannot be simultaneously in and out of Spain, after all. Thus, if it is a better idea to restore Catalonian autonomy than to grant it independence, the resolution is true. Here’s an additional card to help persuade your judge of its solvency:

Autonomy Ideal

Francisco de Borja Lasheras 2017. (Francisco de Borja Lasheras is the Director of the Madrid Office and policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Between 2007 and 2009 he worked for the Fundación Alternativas' Observatory of Spanish Foreign Policy (Opex), and taught comparative European politics at the George Washington University in Madrid.) European Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sep 2017 “Three myths about Catalonia’s independence movement” <http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_three_myths_about_catalonias_independence_movement>

Ideally, a substantial reform of the Spanish Constitution, including a further strengthening of Catalonia’s self-rule, including an explicit recognition of their character as a Nation, could be entertained. It would require elections, qualified majorities and a nation-wide referendum, perhaps followed by a specific referendum in Catalonia.

This best case scenario option could be in the making in the mid-term and help bring some “tactical independentists” (those who support independence to extract more concessions from Madrid) back into the constitutional system and stem the independence impetus, which is precisely what the current movement in Catalonia fears. Both the Spanish Government and PSOE have announced in different occasions more home rule – provided the Catalan Government returns to the constitutional order.

PRO-AT or CON-AT: The Island of Misfit Toys

A/T: We already know that Catalonians want this

Declaration of Dissatisfaction, not Independendence

Feargus O’Sullivan 2017. (A contributing writer for Citylab. He has also written for The Guardian, The Times, The Financial Times, and Next City, among other publications.) CityLab, 3 Oct 2017 “Where the Catalonian Crisis Came From” <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2017/10/where-the-catalonian-crisis-came-from/541749/>

This being the 21st century, there’s still more to it than that. The independence push is also a vessel through which Catalonia’s citizens voice their disaffection with wider problems affecting people across Spain, such as falling living standards and appalling youth unemployment. Faced with a vote for change—any change—people have mobilized, although independence has never quite gained majority support: Pre-referendum data from the Generalitat itself showed a mere 41 percent for independence. It’s not entirely coincidental that the movement has grown during the era of Brexit, another referendum that was partly a vehicle for frustrations that lay beyond the question being directly posed to electorates.…

If so, the ploy has probably failed. While independence voters have not yet enjoyed a clear majority in Catalonia, many citizens—including Barcelona mayor Ada Colau, who has not declared a fixed position on independence—were in favor of being given a vote on the subject. Now, the police have succeeded in resurrecting the specter of dictatorship past in a way that is likely to galvanize support for independence. The Catalonian government is today claiming a 90 percent vote in favor of independence, but the numbers are somewhat meaningless given that only 42.3 percent of voters were able, or chose, to vote.

In other words, not all that many actually turned up to vote. Those who did and voted for independence aren’t all in favor of actually seceding, since some saw it as their only way to oppose the status quo of Spanish governance.

Impact: It has not been shown that the will of the people is in favor of independence.

A proper referendum would need Madrid’s backing

Eleanor Rosenbach 2017. (Contributing writer for The Independent) The Independent, 1 Oct 2017 “The Catalan independence referendum is a smokescreen for other issues” <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/catalan-catalonia-independence-referendum-spain-smokescreen-for-other-issues-a7976841.html>

Whilst the majority of Catalans are pro-referendum, within Catalonia there are numerous currents of thought of which independence is only one. All of these voices have the right to make themselves heard in a referendum on their future. But any referendum in the future must be supported by the Spanish government as part of a constitutional agreement, must paint a clear picture for the Catalan public on what a proposed independent state would look like, and must not be used to deny other significant debates. However, as clashes on the streets show no signs of abating and emotions run high, the solution to this situation looks increasingly elusive.

Impact: Catalonian has a more nuanced set of opinions than “go or stay.” To properly account for them requires another referendum not suppressed by the Spanish central government.

A/T: Don’t reform the constitution

Constitutional Reform Required

Francisco de Borja Lasheras 2017. (Francisco de Borja Lasheras is the Director of the Madrid Office and policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Between 2007 and 2009 he worked for the Fundación Alternativas' Observatory of Spanish Foreign Policy (Opex), and taught comparative European politics at the George Washington University in Madrid.) European Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sep 2017 “Three myths about Catalonia’s independence movement” <http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_three_myths_about_catalonias_independence_movement>

Rather than a David vs Goliath struggle, the Catalan issue is a complex clash of democratic legitimacies: the current majority in the Catalan Parliament vs the majority in the Spanish Parliament. Many Catalans (though not a majority according to most polls) want outright independence, but many Spaniards want a say in the future of their country too. And while the Madrid authorities’ mostly legalistic approach has been met with strong criticisms (sometimes justifiably so), it rests on an impeccably democratic claim: Rajoy has no mandate to allow for a vote of self-determination in Catalonia without substantial reform of the Spanish constitution first – and this requires support from Spaniards.

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