

Spain: a repressive or protective state? How unionist Catalans perceive the Spanish authorities and why it matters

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The unionist Catalans have been referred to as the “silent majority” as they have often been neglected amidst loud calls and mobilisation by separatist Catalans. The paper continues the debate on the perception of repression, by investigating how unionist Catalans perceive the response of the Spanish state towards the Catalan independence movement’s mobilisation.

21 semi-structured interviews with unionist Catalans were conducted in order to investigate their attitudes towards the following four responses from the authorities in Madrid following the Catalan independence referendum held on the 1 October 2017; the police violence against Catalan voters, the speech of King Felipe VI of Spain on the 3 October condemning the referendum, the implementation of Article 155 of the Constitution granting the state political control over Catalonia and the trial against Catalan politicians.

Most of the unionist Catalans interviewed supported the non-violent measures seeing them as just and adequate to bring back order and stability. However, there were a variety of opinions regarding the police violence on the referendum day, with some seeing it as a necessary measure, while others strongly condemning it.

The results suggest that individuals may at times support a government’s use of non-violent repression and to a certain extent its use of violence when it protects their interests.

The existence today of several strong self-determination movements in European democratic countries makes insights into how those opposed to independence perceive the actions towards the independence movement valuable both for political scientists and policymakers alike.