

# Barcelona votes on Catalan independence from Spain

Pro-independence groups hope to improve turnout, but skeptics say non-binding ballot is an exercise in futility

---

Associated Press

guardian.co.uk, Sunday 10 April 2011 20.17 BST

---



Pro-independence activists have organised the vote to ask citizens about Catalan independence from Madrid. Photograph: Josep Lago/AFP/Getty Images

Pro-independence activists have asked citizens of Barcelona whether their north-eastern region of Catalonia should seek to become an autonomous state.

The Catalan capital follows in the footsteps of other regional cities, towns and villages that have held similar informal, nonbinding votes, which have given the idea of independence lukewarm approval.

Pro-independence groups behind the latest referendum said they hope to improve on the 20% turnout of previous ballots.

Maria Garcia, 79, said she voted "yes" to independence to allow Catalans greater control of their own finances. "Spain's government takes more than it gives back," she said.

Catalans are proud of their cultural identity – centered on the distinct Catalan language. The region also accounts for a one-fifth of Spain's economy but only 15th of its 47-million population.

Catalans have long maintained they contribute more than they get credit for and that central governments based in Madrid have discriminated against them.

Along with the Basque region, Catalonia was heavily oppressed under the 1939-1975 Franco dictatorship, which made it a crime to speak Catalan and Basque languages in the interest of promoting Spain as a Madrid-run Castilian-speaking country.

Successive Spanish governments have gradually granted a large degree of self-rule to the regions since Franco's death and the restoration of democracy.

Catalonia won even more self-rule in 2006 with a new autonomy charter, gaining control over judicial, infrastructure and other issues. However, Spain's constitutional court ruled in July 2010 that Catalonia could not legally call itself a nation, dealing a blow to a pro-independence campaign that had used "We decide, we are a nation" as its slogan.

The "Barcelona Decides" poll organisers said that since the first vote in 2009 a total of 600,000

Catalan citizens in 532 cities and towns have been unofficially consulted. The 2009 sample taken in 167 towns indicated 94% of voters favoured independence.

Skeptics have called the nonbinding vote an exercise in futility.

"I think the referendum is theatre put on by politicians," said lawyer Juan Jose Millan, 39. "I am not for independence, just like the majority of Catalans. Independence would not solve real problems like unemployment."

## **Ads by Google**

Top University in Spain

International degrees, transferable credits, IE University in Spain

[www.ie.edu/university](http://www.ie.edu/university)

Spread Betting - Try Now

Try GFTs Award-Winning Trading Platform. Free Practice Account.

[www.GFTuk.com](http://www.GFTuk.com)

Spanish Succession Tax

Did You Know Spanish Succession Tax is Charged on Inheritances & Gifts!

[www.blevinsfranks.com](http://www.blevinsfranks.com)

guardian.co.uk © Guardian News and Media Limited 2011

---