CHAPTER 6

Secession and Immigration: An Exploration of Immigrant Views in the Catalan Case

Núria Franco-Guillén and Sergi Esteve i Garcia

Introduction

On the night of Québec’s 1995 referendum on sovereignty, the prime minister of the Canadian province, Jacques Parizeau, made a speech mentioning “money and the ethnic vote”. These factors were, according to his interpretation, the cause of the independence movement’s failure (a loss by 0.5% of the votes in the referendum). Although it is still too early to be certain, the recent referendum on independence that Scotland conducted on 18 September 2014 has not raised these kinds of claims around the role of the ethnic vote. There were reasons to think that immigrants were inclined towards a yes vote but a recent study suggests this is not the case. In Catalonia, on the 27 September 2014, the Generalitat’s president, Artur Mas, signed a decree calling for a consultation (non-binding vote) on the relationship between Spain and Catalonia, an attempt to culminate a process (hereafter, ‘the Process’) that many argue was already in motion by the summer of 2012. This decree was suspended

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1 This chapter extends a previous exploration of pro-consultation elites’ strategies towards immigration that can be found in: N. Franco-Guillén, “Which People? An Exploration of the Role of Immigration in the Secessionist Process in Catalonia”, in KJ. Nagel and S. Rixxen (eds.), Catalonia in Spain and Europe – Is there a way to Independence? (Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2015).
3 A presentation to the press was done in Scotland in which professor A. Henderson explained preliminary findings on the ‘Scottish Referendum Study’ led in the Centre on Constitutional Change. This study is not available except from the materials presented to the press, which can be found at: http://centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Scottish%20Referendum%20Study%2027%20March%202015.pdf.
4 This process has received many names and labels that involve several concepts, from decision to secession. For the sake of brevity, it shall be called “the Process” as it is the most commonly used term by the press and politicians.
5 That Catalonia had a secessionist movement long before 2012 is no longer contested. One can claim that the Process started in 2010 after the ruling of the Constitutional Court (Tribunal Constitucional, STC 31/2010 of 28 June 2010) that declared parts of the Statute of Autonomy
by the Constitutional Court; instead, a ‘participatory process’ was proposed that finally took place on 9 November 2014. Finally, on 27 September 2015, new elections were held with a plebiscitary character, giving a majority of seats to secessionist forces, but not of votes. In contrast to the cases of Scotland or Québec, we have no information about the electoral behaviour of immigrants in Catalonia and the present chapter is a preliminary step in exploring this topic and specifically immigrant views towards the eventual independence of Catalonia.

The Process that Catalonia is undergoing raises many fundamental questions. These range from whether an autonomous community has a legitimate right to decide (and, indeed, if deciding is a right itself) to what should happen next, including all the implicit procedural questions. As we will see, the plebiscitary elections reduced the proportion of people from immigrant backgrounds that were eligible to vote with respect to the participatory process. Notwithstanding this fact and bearing in mind the cases of Québec and Scotland as precedents, one may well wonder whether immigration itself can have distinctive role within the Process in Catalonia.

In this chapter, we begin by grounding the study of immigrant views on the independence of Catalonia, reviewing literature that highlights the

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6 Plebiscitary elections, in this instance, are to be understood as revolving around independence. In this sense, a joint list for independence called Junts pel Sí, JxS, (Together for Yes) gathered the two major independentist parties (the centre-right Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya, cdc, and the left-wing Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, ERC) along with independent people that were supporting the cause, mainly intellectuals and relevant professionals of Catalonia’s social life. This list also received the support of the two main independentist associations in Catalonia (Omnium Cultural and Assemblea Nacional Catalana). The extreme left wing party, Candidatura d’Unitat Popular, CUP, did not join the list but ran in the elections, also arguing for independence. Despite the fact that the rest of forces did not want to recognize the plebiscitary character, all of the electoral campaign and debates were mainly focused on independence.

7 The clearly independentist lists gathered an absolute majority of the seats (out of 135, JxS obtained 62 and the CUP obtained 10) but 47.8% of the total votes. This has been a matter of debate amongst political forces trying to count the rest of votes, given that the rest of parties were against a unilateral declaration of independence but not necessarily for the status quo. The debate on how to assess the extent of support is still ongoing.