



In Spain's Name



Jordi Borràs

In three months, anti-independence activists have been behind 139 violent incidents in Catalonia, 86 of them physical aggressions.

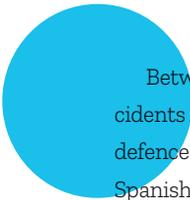
Photo: Jordi Borràs

6

Vandalism, insults, threats and beatings are just some of the Spanish unionist-inspired attacks that were seen in autumn 2017, especially after 1 October. Although the perpetrators are a small minority among all the people who have come out in favour of Spanish unity, the violence cuts across boundaries and has set the tone in a great many of the mobilisations by anti-independentists. Far-right militants have been behind a great many incidents, but by no means all of them: in many cases, the only common denominator among the aggressors is the display of pro-Spain symbols or slogans. The majority of the Madrid-based media have ignored these aggressions and fed an anti-Catalanist narrative that has made them even more immune from punishment.

To complement this report:

Appendix. Chronology of Incidents. Page 136



Between 8 September and 11 December, at least 139 violent incidents took place in Catalonia that were politically motivated in defence of the unity of Spain (without including the actions of the Spanish police on and around 1 October to prevent the referendum from going ahead). Of these — you can consult the complete list of incidents in the appendix at the end of this Yearbook — the majority (86) were physical aggressions, which caused a total of 101 victims with injuries of varying degrees of consideration. The remaining offences were of a range of types, although primarily we find threats, intimidation, vandalism, damage to private property and at least two cases of sexual violence.

The investigation into these incidents by the Mèdia.cat Yearbook has been based on research and verification through journalistic, police and eye-witness sources and, whenever possible, through the victims themselves. Names have not been published because we have wanted to protect identities to the utmost, although in some cases the public nature of the cases makes this difficult. The number of incidents collected may increase as many violent actions have not been reported to the police or have not been gathered through witness statements. The aim of this research is to raise the profile of the cases of violence in the form of investigative journalism, at all times respecting the legal course of the various procedures already under way, and those that we have been told will be initiated. Similarly, the focus of this work centres on the facts and not on the perpetrators, since that is a task for the parties and the legal agents.

It should not be forgotten either that there was violence both before and after the 95 days included in this report. Several cases that could have been included have been left out as they occurred outside the period under analysis, due to the impossibility of verifying some of the information or also due to the doubt — despite the indications — of the political motivation behind the offence. This is the case, for example, of the vandalism that occurred on the night of 3 October, when the tyres on over 160 vehicles in Girona were slashed. For reasons of space — it would have been impossible to determine

the extent – we have also left out offences on social media, although we have included three cases where they have played a notable role and that have resulted in public persecution or in businesses related to the victims being affected. Neither does the report include the countless acts of vandalism against offices of political parties and associations, private homes, schools and monuments. It does, however, include the cases where graffiti involved death threats or the acts of vandalism caused serious damage. We have also left out those events that, despite being directly related to the wave of violence around the referendum of 1 October, occurred outside the Principality of Catalonia. Taking into consideration the selection we have made to reduce the size of the sample, it should be pointed out that a more in-depth study could increase this figure considerably.

A narrative that dehumanises independentism

The climate of tension and violence against independentism – and against those who favour the right to self-determination – has created a wave of Catalanophobia and anti-Catalan sentiment that has extended outside the Principality and made itself felt all over the Catalan Lands under the domain of the Spanish state. In Valencia, 15 incidents were reported between September and November, such as the aggressions by far-right militants during the 9 October march, which left several demonstrators and journalists injured. In Palma de Mallorca, on 7 October, the attack on the stand of the *Assemblea Sobiranista de Mallorca* (the Mallorcan Sovereign Assembly) during a pro-Spanish unity demonstration caused material damages and at least one person was injured.

To a lesser extent, similar events have occurred in a number of parts of Spain, such as the taunting by pro-unity demonstrators in Zaragoza on 24 September against an event by *Podemos* in defence of an official referendum, where the president of the Aragon Regional Assembly was injured and a Catalan TV3 car attacked. Beyond the Pyrenees, an example of the pro-Spanish unity violence was the raid organised on social media to tear down independentist flags from

homes in the London suburb of Camden and the threats of organising “a night of broken glass” if independentist estelada flags were not removed, in light of which the Metropolitan Police began an investigation.

Both inside and outside Catalonia, it is hard to explain this widespread climate of violence without analysing the narrative created in autumn 2017 by the judiciary, the police, the state itself and, to a large extent, the Madrid-based media where critical voices raised against the Spanish government’s stance with regard to the Catalan issue were notable for their absence. The demonisation of the independence movement, of the Catalan media, of the Catalan school system and of the Mossos d’Esquadra Catalan police has contributed to dehumanising the independentists and justifying the police violence against supporters of the referendum. A symbol of this is the infamous “A por ellos!” (Go get them!), the chant used by supporters of Spanish unity to encourage the Spanish police sent to Catalonia to try to stop people from voting on 1 October. The figures show that it is precisely after the day of the referendum that the number of incidents rocketed, coinciding with the wave of repression on the day, which resulted in 1,066 injuries. October saw the majority of the facts under study, with a total of 80.

The creation of this media narrative is, precisely, one of the causes of the violence against independentism, according to historian Carles Viñas, a specialist in the far right and Catalan nationalism and a doctor in contemporary history and lecturer at the University of Barcelona. Viñas adds two further reasons: on the one hand, the

sense of abandonment of Spanish nationalists in light of the lack of a political response from their parliamentary representatives, who denied the legitimacy of the referendum and left the Catalan Parliament on 6 and 7 September, and on the other, the

The widespread climate of violence cannot be explained without analysing the narrative created by the judiciary, the police, the state itself and the media

realisation for the first time by supporters of Spanish unity that the aspirations of the independentists were a serious threat. This realisation led to the large pro-Spain demonstrations the following spring that were a hothouse for many of the violent incidents collected in this research. This study shows that on 8, 12 and 29 October, coinciding with the three large demonstrations organised by the pro-unity Societat Civil Catalana (SCC) in Barcelona, 34 violent episodes occurred.

Pro-Spain violence cuts across boundaries

This violence is not a new phenomenon in Catalonia. Viñas sets out at least two antecedents: the attacks by pro-Spain militants against members of *Unió Catalanista* and *Estat Català*, which led to a number of deaths in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and the appearance of neo-Nazi skinheads, the inclusion of racism in the Spanish far-right discourse and the confrontations with a combative independentism that was just emerging in the 1980s. Even so, according to Viñas, there is something about the current wave of violence that sets it apart: these offences are no longer the exclusive terrain of the militant far right, as was the case in the 1920s and 1980s. This time, the attackers cannot always be classed as alt-right, as the violence has transcended its classical environment – the far right – towards a pro-Spanish unity sentiment that cuts across the old boundaries.

In many of the incidents analysed, it is not possible to establish a link between the aggressors and a specific ideology, as their only common denominator is the display of symbols or slogans in favour of the unity of Spain. Such is the case that even the prototype of the aggressor has changed: gender, age and a particular look are no longer a common pattern. This conclusion is also shared by the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, who note that most of the people identified and arrested in connection with these events had no criminal records relating to their political activity but common criminal records instead. Besides this, it is also particularly alarming to find that in

four cases, it is recorded that the aggressors were members of the Spanish Policia Nacional or the Guardia Civil, three of whom were off duty. Unlike the police violence on and around 1 October, these events have been included in the figures because of their anti-Catalan or directly Catalanophobic component.

Another noteworthy element that is especially repeated in incidents that occurred during the demonstrations is that the victims speak of how other demonstrators who initially went over to separate the sides or help the victims subsequently ended up justifying the attitude of the violent demonstrators. Other victims speak of riot police – both the Mossos d'Esquadra and the Policia Nacional – standing by while aggressions were taking place.

It should also be stressed that in a significant number of cases of violence (28), the victims preferred not to file a complaint. According to their own stories, this is primarily for three reasons: out of fear, whether this is at having to come into contact with their aggressor again or that the aggressor might find out their personal details during the prosecution; out of a lack of confidence in a slow and often ineffective legal system in offences of this nature; and finally, because of the monetary costs and the time it would take. It has not always been easy to ascertain whether an official complaint has been filed. This is why we find a large number of cases where it is not known whether a complaint has been filed: 59 in all, more than the 52 cases where there is record of a complaint being filed.

The majority of the aggressions, threats and other offences in this research could be counted as so-called hate crimes because they were motivated by the victim's ideology (independentists, pro-referendum), directly because of their origin or feeling of identity. In addition, the message of hate becomes a warning to the rest of the people with a similar political ideology or origin. It is also relevant that of the 139 cases studied, there are 30 where the victims are journalists, many of them from the public media. Included among the victims, there are also seven cases in which members of the Mossos d'Esquadra have experienced aggression, threats or insults,

and an eighth case of a police officer with Barcelona's Guàrdia Urbana municipal police, injured by far-right activists. Seven of these eight cases affecting the Catalan police occurred after 1 October, coinciding with the media debate on the role of the Mossos on the day of the referendum. Finally, we should highlight the large amount of graffiti painted on schools throughout the country, insulting the teachers or the Catalan education system, none of which has been included in the report for the reasons already stated, although the case of two teachers injured in a school does appear.

All of the incidents that we set out have gone practically unnoticed by most of the Spanish state media. They have been especially ignored by the same Spanish press that – with the exception of a few cases – uncritically bought into the argument that has led the legal apparatus to imprison the association leaders Jordi Sánchez and Jordi Cuixart for sedition, an offence that includes public uprising, disorder and violence, despite the peaceful nature of the demonstrations that they led being more than demonstrated.



Jordi Borràs

(Gràcia, Barcelona, 1981). Freelance photojournalist and illustrator, member of the Barnils Group. He works with a number of newspapers, including El Món, El Temps, Crític and Basque magazine Argia. He has devoted part of his career to investigating the far right and Spanish nationalism in Catalonia. He has published four books: *Warcelona: Una història de violència* (Pol-len edicions, 2013), *Plus Ultra. Una crònica gràfica de l'espanyollisme a Catalunya* (Pol-len edicions, 2015), *Desmuntant Societat Civil Catalana* (Saldonar, 2015) and *La cara B del procés* (Pagès editors, 2016).

VIOLENT INCIDENTS PROVOKED BY SUPPORTERS OF SPANISH UNITY

Aggressions, threats, acts of vandalism and other incidents of an anti-independentist or anti-referendum political motivation recorded in Catalonia between 8 September and 11 December 2017.

Source: produced by the author based on journalistic, police and eye-witness sources. You will find the complete chronology of incidents in the annex to this YEARBOOK

22 SEPTEMBER
FAR-RIGHT DEMONSTRATION ORGANISED IN FRONT OF THE ANC HEADQUARTERS IN BARCELONA

30 SEPTEMBER
PRO-SPAIN DEMONSTRATION WITH FAR-RIGHT GROUPS IN THE CENTRE OF BARCELONA

1 OCTOBER
REFERENDUM

DEMONSTRATION BY FALANGE AND DEMOCRACIA NACIONAL IN BARCELONA

3 OCTOBER
GENERAL STRIKE

12 OCTOBER
PRO-SPAIN DEMONSTRATION BY SOCIETAT CIVIL CATALANA IN THE CENTRE OF BARCELONA

18 OCTOBER
PRO-SPAIN DEMONSTRATION AT PLAÇA FRANCESC MACIÀ IN BARCELONA

8 OCTOBER
PRO-SPAIN DEMONSTRATION BY SOCIETAT CIVIL CATALANA IN THE CENTRE OF BARCELONA

8 9 10 ... 20 ... 22 23 24 25 26 ... 29 30 1 2 3 4 ... 8 9 10 ... 12 ... 16 ... 18 ... 23 ... 25 26

september

october

27 OCTOBER
PROCLAMATION
OF THE CATALAN
REPUBLIC

PRO-SPAIN DEMONSTRATION AT PLAÇA ARTÓS IN BARCELONA



29 OCTOBER
PRO-SPAIN DEMONSTRATION BY SOCIETAT CIVIL CATALANA IN THE CENTRE OF BARCELONA

30 OCTOBER
ANTI-FASCIST DEMONSTRATION AND PRO-SPAIN GATHERING IN LA BONANOVA IN BARCELONA

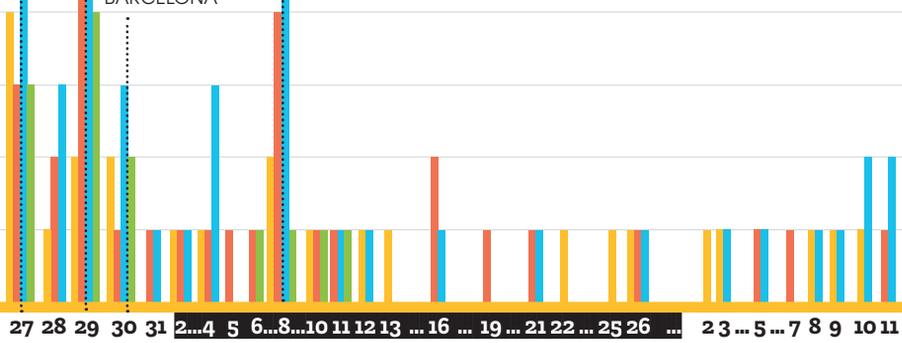
4 NOVEMBER
PRO-SPAIN DEMONSTRATION WITH THE PRESENCE OF THE FAR RIGHT IN MATARÓ

95
DAYS IN TOTAL

139
CASES:
52 OFFICIAL COMPLAINTS FILED ,
28 NO OFFICIAL COMPLAINTS ,
59 NOT KNOWN 

86
AGGRESSIONS
101 VICTIMS OF PHYSICAL AGGRESSION 

30
CASES INVOLVING JOURNALISTS 



november

december