# Millions defy brutal crackdown by Spanish police to vote in Catalan referendum

**Alejandro López, Alex Lantier**
**2 October 2017**

Mass protests engulfed Catalonia Sunday as large parts of the region's population mobilized against a brutal and indiscriminate crackdown by Spanish national police, who were dispatched to block the Catalan government's referendum on secession from Spain. Millions worldwide reacted with horror to television news reports showing Civil Guard riot police assaulting peaceful protesters, including teenagers and elderly people, who were defending polling stations or lined up to vote.

The Popular Party (PP) government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy sent some 16,000 police to Catalonia to shut down polling stations, seize ballot boxes and attack voters. At least 844 people were injured across the region as police launched baton charges and fired rubber bullets. The police operation failed to overcome mass popular resistance, however. Catalan authorities claimed that 90 percent of the 2,315 polling stations organized for the referendum had remained open.

Early on Sunday, a helicopter and some 100 Civil Guards descended on Sant Julià de Ramis, the voting place of regional Premier Carles Puigdemont, and attempted to storm the village's polling station. Hundreds of voters blocked the doors of the local sports center that served as the polling station, chanting "We will vote!", but police used a hammer to break the glass, forced their way into the building, and beat or dragged off the voters.

Police attacked and beat voters at schools and other polling places across the regional capital, Barcelona. Videos emerged of officers kicking people sitting in polling places and dragging women away by their hair. At the Escola Infant Jesús School polling place, police assaulted Maria José Molina, 64, whose picture with her head drenched in blood went viral on the Internet.

Molina told Barcelona-based daily *La Vanguardia* that she was sitting next to her husband several meters from the door when riot police grabbed her shoulders and legs and carried her off. "I am a light woman," she said, adding that police officers "threw me face first to the pavement."

Police arriving in towns across the region rapidly found themselves facing large, hostile crowds who booed and demanded that they leave. In Girona, police tried to seize the ballots at the Escola Verd de Girona, when a crowd shouting, "We want to vote! We want to vote!" blocked the main entrance. Police then assaulted the crowd, which began to chant "Murderers! Murderers!"

Opposition to the police crackdown extended throughout the region, including in areas opposed to independence. In L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, Catalonia's second city—home to first, second and third generation Spanish-speaking migrant workers who went to Catalonia in the 1960s—police were met with protesters chanting in Spanish, "Go away, occupation forces!" and "We want to vote!"

Spanish police also clashed with Catalan officials, including firefighters who turned out to form human shields between riot police and voters, and the region's police, the Mossos d'Esquadra.

After the Spanish police's rampage across Catalonia yesterday, the explosive conflict between Madrid and Barcelona is set to further escalate today. While Puigdemont claimed a victory for the Catalan referendum and called for secession late last night, Spanish officials in Madrid offered a brazen defense of their onslaught against the population of Catalonia and demanded that the Catalan administration submit to its diktat.

Denouncing the referendum as "an illegal mobilization with disorganized logistics," Spanish Prime Minister Rajoy spoke from the Moncloa Palace to defend his decision to unleash his police against the Catalan population. He said that "the state responded with firmness and serenity… We did what we had to do. I direct the government and we have carried out our responsibilities."

Rajoy bluntly demanded that the Catalan government abandon the referendum: "I ask them to end their irresponsibility, to admit that what was never legal is now clearly unrealizable, and that continuing this farce will take them nowhere… Put an end to it. It will lead to nothing good."

Late last night, in Barcelona, Puigdemont responded by

© World Socialist Web Site

saying that the Spanish state had "written today a shameful page in the history of its relations with Catalonia." He added, "Catalonia's citizens have won the right to have an independent state constituted in the form of a republic… In consequence, my government will transmit in the coming days to the Parliament, the seat and expression of the sovereignty of our people, today's electoral results so that it can act as specified by the Referendum Law."

The Referendum Law states that under these conditions, Catalonia will declare independence and secede from Spain, even though only a minority of the total population voted "yes." 2.26 million people voted yesterday, or 42 percent of the 5.34 million voters in Catalonia. Of these, 2.02 million voted "yes", and 176,000 voted "no."

Puigdemont appealed for support from the European Union bureaucracy in Brussels, asserting that Spain's conduct "violates its fundamental principles" and adding that the Catalan issue was "no longer an internal matter" of Spain.

The crackdown, coming after weeks of threats and police operations launched by Madrid in Catalonia, is a political indictment not only of the PP, but of the entire Spanish ruling elite and all of Spain's main NATO allies. While Spanish police raided offices, confiscated ballots and arrested officials, and the government in Madrid sent police reinforcements, heads of state including US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron met with Rajoy and issued cordial joint statements calling for Spanish unity.

Last night, Britain's Foreign Office whitewashed the PP crackdown. Its spokeswoman said, "The referendum is a matter for the Spanish government and people. We want to see Spanish law and the Spanish Constitution respected and the rule of law upheld."

This is a fraud! Madrid's barbaric crackdown was not a legal action, but an act of terror against innocent people aimed at whipping an entire region of Spain into line. The country has seen nothing like it since the Spanish Civil War and the end in 1978 of the 40-year regime of the fascist dictator Francisco Franco.

The stench surrounding the ruling establishment in Madrid extends to Washington and the major European powers. They are reprising the role they played during Franco's rule: endorsing a bloodstained right-wing Spanish regime they see as a key military ally, and one that is dedicated to the suppression of the working class.

The crackdown has also exposed the bankruptcy of the two main opposition parties in the Spanish parliament, the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and Podemos. Unsurprisingly, the PSOE, a tool of the Spanish state machine, refounded as an explicitly anti-Marxist, social democratic party in 1979, unequivocally endorsed Rajoy's crackdown.

PSOE General Secretary Pedro Sánchez, who is often presented as a "left" within the party, hailed Rajoy and the PP: "I want to express the full support of the PSOE for Spain's rule of law, its rules and its institutions, the support of the PSOE for the territorial integrity of this country that is now at risk. We are in a moment in which the general interest must prevail over the parties… it is the moment of reason, of common sense."

As for Podemos, while hordes of riot police beat and bloodied innocent people across Catalonia, it issued impotent appeals for the PSOE to abandon its tacit support for the minority PP government in Madrid and instead form a coalition government with Podemos. As the first police attacks began, Podemos officials began appealing to the PSOE. Iñigo Errejón, secretary for policy and strategy, asked in a tweet, "Why is the PSOE so silent?" Irene Montero, spokesperson for Podemos in parliament, said "the PSOE has to be more democratic."

Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias told the press: "The PSOE cannot continue looking away. They have made a serious mistake by supporting the PP's strategy. Better late than never and hopefully they will rectify and support us to get the PP out."

The bankruptcy of the PSOE and Podemos notwithstanding, the minority PP government hangs by a thread after its bloody crackdown. The Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), whose support was key to passing the PP government's budget this year, has criticized the PP and on Saturday it led a march in Bilbao in defense of the Catalan referendum.

*The authors also recommend:*

Oppose the state crackdown on the Catalan independence referendum!

For working class unity! No to separatism in Spain!

[30 September 2017]

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**

© World Socialist Web Site