

Twitter Engagement Analysis of Catalan and Spanish Politicians during the 2017 Diada, Referendum, and Independence Declaration

Dr. Marc Perelló-Sobrepere
EU Business School, Barcelona Campus.
Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain.
marc.perello@euruni.edu

Dr. Joan-Francesc Fondevila-Gascón
Escola Universitaria Mediterrani, Universitat de Girona.
Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain.
jf.fondevila@eum.es

Abstract: *This paper analyzes Twitter engagement for Carles Puigdemont, the President of the Catalan Government, and Mariano Rajoy, the Prime Minister of Spain, during three critical dates in Catalan politics: the Diada on September 11th, the 1-O Referendum on October 1st, and the Catalan Declaration of Independence on October 27th, 2017. The analysis reveals that despite Mariano Rajoy's broader and larger following, Carles Puigdemont generated more interaction on Twitter. Additionally, the paper examines the Twitter activity of all Catalan Parliament leaders of 2017, providing a comprehensive view of the political landscape. Contextualizing these findings, the paper covers events from 2017 to 2024, offering a deeper understanding of the evolving political dynamics. The results underscore the significance of Twitter as a vital platform for the Catalan independence movement, highlighting its role in shaping political discourse and engagement.*

Keywords: *Catalan politics, Independence Referendum, Twitter engagement, Carles Puigdemont, Spanish-Catalan relations*

Date of Submission: 03-07-2024

Date of Acceptance: 16-07-2024

I. Introduction

Catalonia is sometimes described as a “nation without a state” (Keating 2001). The Catalan pro-independence movement is said to be non-essentialist, inclusive, and with a non-ethnic character, clearly distinguishing them from far-right movements, ethno-nationalist politics (Keating, 2008), and other top-bottom, elitist and sometimes mythical nationalisms (Perelló-Sobrepere, 2018). Possibly because of these characteristics, the pro-independence movement has been gaining notoriety during the past years, especially in academic circles and in the international press (Cramer, 2015; Dowling, 2017; Della Porta et al., 2017) due to events occurred in the last quarter of the year 2017: the Catalan Diada on September 11, the referendum on October 1, and the declaration of independence on October 27. These events led to the detention and imprisonment of half of the Catalan government, and the exile of the other half, deeply modifying the relationship between Catalonia and Spain. The first of these events to be analysed in this paper is the Diada, a Catalan festivity occurring on its National Day, September 11. Although the celebration of the Diada in Catalonia had always been attached to Catalonia's self-sovereign claims (Michonneau, 2001), it had never become so explicitly about independence as it had turned since the year 2012. From that year on, each September 11 millions of Catalans rallied the streets of Barcelona and other cities in Catalonia every year to demand a Catalan state (Perelló-Sobrepere, 2017, 2018).

In the Catalan elections of 2015, a pro-independence coalition was formed for the very first time: Junts pel Sí (JxSí). This coalition pledged to organize a legal referendum within 18 months. The JxSí coalition, formed by the centre-right party *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC), and the centre-left party of *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC), governed Catalonia from January 12, 2016, to October 27, 2017, with the help of the *Popular Unity Candidacy* (CUP), who did not become part of the Government, but offered support in the Parliament sessions. As a result of this political partnership, on June 9, 2017, the date of the referendum on the independence of Catalonia was officially announced at a ceremony held jointly by the government and some of the most notorious pro-independence associations, including the *Catalan National Assembly* (in Catalan: *Assamblea Nacional Catalan – ANC*) and *Òmnium Cultural*. The Catalan President at the time, Carles

Puigdemont, announced during the Summer of 2017 that the referendum would be held on October 1 and that the question up for discussion would be as follows: “Do you want Catalonia to be an independent state in the form of a republic?” (with only two possible answers: yes or no). It was decided that the ballots would be printed in Catalan, Spanish, and Aranese (Requejo and Sanjaume-Calvet, 2019). The Catalan authorities also emphasised that this referendum would be binding on the part of the government, unlike the November 9, 2014, participative process (Perelló-Sobrepere, 2017, 2018). Preparations for the referendum continued until autumn when the climax was reached (Pascal, 2022).

II. State of the art

To better contextualize the Twitter analysis that is proposed in the second part of this paper, we have first worked on an ethnographic study of the three days in which this paper is focused on. These days are the Catalan National Day on September 11; the independence referendum on October 1, and the declaration of independence on October 27.

2.1 September 1, 2017: Catalonia’s National Day – La Diada

Since 2012, ANC and Òmnium had been petitioning for the Catalan government to take concrete steps towards the independence of Catalonia (Crameri, 2015). As a matter of fact, since ANC got involved in the organization of the Diada, in 2012, the Catalan National Day had become more of a demonstration than a mobilization (Humlebæk and Hau, 2020). The Diada of 2017 would be no different than it was for the previous five years, except this time, Catalan citizens knew they would be soon voting in a referendum. Thus, the anticipation was higher than ever before.

The 2017 Diada took place amid much political tension between the Spanish Government and its Catalan counterpart (Caspersen et al., 2017). Shortly before the official campaign for the referendum would initiate on 15 September, the pro-independence movement chose the National Day to organise another remarkable demonstration on September 11. The demonstration was called La Diada del Sí (The National Day for Yes). It was organised by the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) with the collaboration of Òmnium Cultural and aimed at becoming as successful as the previous pro-independence marches occurred from the year 2012 onwards, which had been followed by millions of people. Much like the previous September 11 demonstration, both ANC and Òmnium organized the protest via the internet (Perelló-Sobrepere, 2017, 2018). On September 10, 450,000 personas had already been registered online to attend the protest.

As in the previous years (Giori, 2017) the demonstration included a well-staged and planned performance. This time, the protesters formed a plus sign (+) filling the streets of Passeig de Gràcia and Carrer Aragó de Barcelona. For this, both the ANC and Òmnium minutely divided the attendants in different sections to make the plus sign possible. On September 11, at 17:00h (5pm), four banners were deployed at each end of the plus sign. They moved towards the centre, converging at 17:14h (an allegorical symbol of the year 1714). The banners included messages in favour of democracy and peace. As the banners advanced, the protesters put on fluorescent yellow t-shirts created specifically for this event. The colour was chosen to honour the volunteers of the pro-independence movement, who often wear a yellow vest when they are giving instructions to protesters and coordinating the demonstrations in the streets – as a matter of fact, the yellow colour has remained ever since associated to the Catalan independence movement. As happened in every other year, the turnout doubled the registrations, given that not everyone who attended went through the registration process. Barcelona’s local police numbered the attendees at 1,000,000. This accounted for 200,000 more than the previous demonstration in 2016, showing the strength of mobilisation. No aerial footage could be taken of this because the Spanish Government had banned helicopters and drones from the flying zone (except for those of the Spanish Police). This was regarded by the pro-independence movements as an attempt by the government to censor the demonstration. The social networks were taken by the pro-independence activists who once again made the hashtags #laDiadadelSi and #11s2017 both the national and the international trending topic ranking on Twitter. Some foreign journalists and international correspondents used their own social networks for live coverage of the protest, such as Raphael Minder (from The New York Times) and Michael Stothard (from The Financial Times), both of whom highlighted the peaceful character of the protesters and the overall demonstration.

Two laws passed by the Catalan Parliament on September 6, 7 and 8, are key to understanding the events that occurred in October (Lupien, 2020). The first was the Law on the Referendum on the Self-determination of Catalonia (Catalan: Llei del referèndum d’autodeterminació), while the second law was the Law on the Juridical Transition and Foundation of the Republic (Catalan: Llei de transitorietat jurídica i fundacional de la República). The main objective of these laws was to build a legal framework that would guarantee legal security for a proper succession from the respective administrations and the continuity of public services in what would be called a

“transition process” from the then autonomous community of Catalonia to an independent Catalan state. The Law on the Referendum on the Self-determination of Catalonia was also meant to provide a legal framework for the Catalan Government in which to hold the independence referendum on October 1, 2017, as a binding self-determination referendum on the independence of Catalonia.

2.2. October 1, 2017: The day of the Referendum

The referendum on the independence of Catalonia (officially the Referendum on the Self-determination of Catalonia, also known by the 1-O abbreviation), which was a binding, self-determination referendum, took place all over Catalonia on October 1, 2017. Before that day, opinion polls held by different media had shown for months that an astonishing 80% of Catalans thought that a referendum on independence was the best possible solution to decide the future of Catalonia (Nichols, 2017).

The referendum was thus a commitment the Government of Catalonia, which was formed after the 2015 Catalan elections. In this election, those in favour of the referendum obtained a majority in the Catalan Parliament and began to organize the referendum. The Spanish Government opposed it from the very beginning, and never allowed for it, citing accordance with the interpretation of the laws and the constitution of the country at that time (Lopez Bofill, 2019). The call for the referendum was officially suspended by the Constitutional Court of Spain the day after its approval, but the Catalan Government continued with its organisation, which was based on the Law on the Referendum on the Self-determination of Catalonia, approved on September 6, 2017. As such, the referendum was convened amid a clash with respect to current legalities. More than two million people voted, despite the scenes of serious violence triggered due to the Spanish Police shutting down polling stations. The number of electoral colleges opened for the 1-O Referendum was 2,315, and the number of tables was 6,249. The total electoral register comprised of 5,343,358 eligible voters over 18 years of age. According to the Catalan government, the referendum met all the criteria that one could ask for in a regular election. The Referendum was also attended by several international observers who, in turn, verified the proper development of the referendum (Cetrà et al., 2018).

During the day of the Referendum, both the Spanish Police and the Catalan Police had orders to prevent schools where the voting had to take place from opening (Lupien, 2020). This resulted in thousands of tweets and messages being shared by many among the pro-independence movement to let know their colleagues and fellow protestors of the exact moves of the Police and how to avoid them whilst protecting the voting stations. The movement became once more trending topic, both nationally and internationally, throughout the day, accounting for thousands of publications in Facebook, Instagram (particularly on Instagram Stories) and Twitter, with live connections from the different schools being attacked. To prevent the seizing of the schools, those living in the vicinity of these schools, alongside the Association of mothers and fathers (AMPA) of each of the schools and the so-called Referendum Defence Committees (CDR), began to organise activities within the schools to keep the police from preventing the police from stopping the activities.

At the beginning of referendum day, the Catalan Police (Mossos d’Esquadra) requisitioned some boxes and ballot papers and took over control of 227 schools. As a result of Mossos’ efforts, another 400 voting stations were never even allowed to open. The Mossos’ commander at the time, Josep Lluís Trapero, ordered a peaceful closing of the schools when possible. However, it is now known that the Spanish Police had received different orders, and as opposite to the Catalan Police, the Spanish Police did use the force against the demonstrators. According to the government of the Generalitat, on the day of the vote, 893 civilians were treated by the Medical Emergency System of Catalonia because of actions by the Spanish Police (CatSalut, 2017). The day after, when reports from other medical centres were received, the total number of those injured due to the force used by the National Police and the Civil Guard rose to 1066: five of serious nature, with one victim losing vision in one eye. Twenty-three of the injured were older than 79 years, and two of them were under 11 years. It must be noted too that some people suffered anxiety attacks as a resulting of witnessing the police charges broadcast on television. During the assaults on schools, rubber bullets – which are prohibited in Catalonia – were used, as was tear gas (Barceló, 2018).

The National Police and Civil Guard actions led to the closing of 92 further schools, while 319 colleges were closed by Mossos d’Esquadra and the Spanish state bodies. It is noteworthy, however, that the schools closed by the Catalan Police (Mossos d’Esquadra) did not cause any human injuries. On the other hand, in contrast were the violent acts of the Spanish Police (Policia Nacional), which injured more than 1,000 people – such an act was widely denounced on the social networks. Although the Spanish Government defended the tactics adopted by the police, international observers and journalists expressed shock (Dubois and Villeneuve-Siconnelly, 2019).

International politicians such as the Belgian Prime Minister, the Finnish Foreign Minister, the Slovenian Prime Minister, and numerous deputies condemned the repression via Twitter. The subjective chronicles by the Spanish media made previously, during and after the 1-O referendum were greatly countered and discredited by many international media outlets. CNN referred to “the shame of Europe” on its website on the same day as the referendum, at the same time providing live footage of the incident. Other than the BBC, more media outlets such as Libération expressed an opinion that the events of October 1 represented the defeat of Rajoy’s politics. On the contrary, most of the Spanish media leaned towards the Spanish government, in what was seen as a blatant biased attempt, yet an unsuccessful one, to wash the image of Rajoy’s cabinet (Almiron, 2019). Due to the partial information being spread by the Spanish media, many Catalan politicians (and even some Spanish ones) opted to re-tweet international media all throughout the day.

From the very same day of the referendum until the end of the year, the hashtag #ThisIsTheRealSpain was used on Twitter to internationalize the attacks and damage caused by the Spanish Police in the Referendum of October 1, 2017. A website (<https://spanishpolice.github.io>) was created to gather the videos of the Spanish Police violent repression on demonstrators. The website began with 365 videos, mostly from journalists, but after many protesters sent their self-recorded cell-phone videos, the website reached over 800 videos in total. In December 2017, Human Rights Watch published a report stating that the violence exercised by the Civil Guard and the National Police against the peaceful protesters could not be justified in any way. The report was based on interviews with victims and witnesses. It also included photographic, audio-visual, and medical evidence, including a compilation of videos from various cities (Cetrà, 2018). The NGO also asked the Spanish Government to investigate the allegations, which they did not.

On October 2, the Generalitat de Catalunya made the results of the 1-O Referendum public. The results were as follows (100% scrutinised):

1. Do you want Catalonia to become a republic?		
Option	Votes	%
Yes	2,044,038	90.18%
No	177,547	7.83%
Blank votes	44,913	1.98%
Invalid votes	19,719	0.96%
Total	2,286,217	43%

Table 1: 1-O Referendum results.

The total number of eligible voters was 5,313,564. The Catalan Government later speculated that a total of 770,000 persons had not been able to vote because their electoral college had been closed by the Civil Guard, the National Police, and Mossos d’Esquadra. Those who had already voted at schools – those acting as voting centres that were eventually closed – could not vote again at another location. Had their votes been counted, these voters would have brought the total participation closer to three million and. It would, therefore, have crossed the 50% threshold.

The following table compares the results of the November 9, 2014, participation process, and the October 1, 2017, referendum:

1. Do you want Catalonia to become a republic?		
Option	2014	2017
Yes	1,861,753	2,044,038
Yes-no	232,182	--
Yes-blank	22,466	--
No	104,772	177,547
Blank votes	12,986	44,913
Invalid votes	71,131	19,719
Total	2,305,290	2,286,217

Table 2: 9-N, 2014 and 1-O, 2014 Referendums results comparison.

Given that a different question and a different electoral register was used in each of the consultations, and because many thousand votes were sequestered by the Spanish Police in the 2017 referendum, it is not possible to extract any conclusion regarding the total participation of the two consultation processes. However, it is noteworthy that, in both cases, the “yes campaign” proved to be overwhelmingly victorious.

A general strike was called for October 3, 2017, to denounce the repression exerted by the Spanish Police (Civil Guard and National Police) during the referendum, which left over 1,000 wounded. Union leaders called for a demonstration in most Catalan cities at noon as a sign of protest the violence perpetrated by the Spanish Police. But not only the Union leaders called for it: for the first time in years, but the strike was also supported by many associations of all political colors. Moreover, the Government of Catalonia also partook in the strike (Nichols, 2017). The strike was widely supported among the Catalan press too. Several traditional media outlets, such as TV3 (the Catalan public broadcaster), adhered to the general strike, which had not occurred in a long time, as did the commercial television channel 8TV. Catalunya Ràdio (a public broadcaster) and the commercial radio situation RAC1 also decided to join the strike, and they interrupted their regular programming. The newspapers ARA and El Punt Avui, both pro-independence, did not issue a print edition, although they did keep some services running in their newsrooms, so that they could publicise reports on the demonstrations via their websites. As for the public administration, more than 70% of workers joined the strike. Overwhelming support was issued by public transport (TMB) as well: buses did not operate in Barcelona, and only minimum Metro services were provided. Dockers from the Port of Barcelona and the Port of Tarragona were in 100% support of the strike. Some large logistics centres such as Mercabarna (the biggest large-scale food trade market in all of Catalonia) as well as many health centres also joined the strike. The Catalan Police counted around 700,000 demonstrators in Barcelona and around 250,000 demonstrators in all other Catalan cities, bringing the total closer to one million, a number like those who had turned out on September 11, 2017, pro-independence rally. The ban of the Spanish Government on helicopters or drones flying over the skies made it impossible to gather large-scale images of the demonstrations – images that Madrid wanted to avoid at all costs, just as they had done on referendum day.

2.3. October 27, 2017: The Declaration of Independence

On October 10, 2017, during a session of the Catalan Parliament, Carles Puigdemont made a partial declaration of independence, pending a Spanish Government response and hoping for international mediation (Foffani, 2018). During the two weeks following this declaration, the Spanish Government instigated the bureaucratic moves necessary to apply Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution to the Government of Catalonia to effectively remove and replace it. This process required President Carles Puigdemont to clarify whether he had declared independence on October 10. The Spanish Government wrote to the Puigdemont twice, both times receiving an ambiguous reply from the Catalan President, thus leaving the door open to further dialogue with Madrid. The Spanish Government ignored the Catalan President’s call for dialogue, assuming that Catalan independence had been effectively declared, which forced them to hold a special session in the Senate on October 27, during which Article 155 would be discussed and applied to Catalonia. Given the Spanish Government’s attempt to accelerate the application of Article 155 and the lack of response to the call for dialogue, which was understood by the Catalan Government as an implicit denial of its petition of dialogue, Catalan members of parliament were called to a session on October 27. At 15.30, the declaration was approved with 70 votes in favour, 10 against, and two abstentions, while 53 deputies left the chamber as a mark of protest, refusing to vote.

Following the declaration of independence, some municipalities, such as Girona and Sabadell, withdrew the Spanish flag from their facades. The ANC and Òmnium called for gatherings in every Catalan town and city to celebrate the declaration, with the most prominent gatherings taking place in Barcelona. Meanwhile, in Madrid, in the Spanish Senate, the application to trigger Article 155 was being discussed; it was finally approved as the day came to an end, effectively removing the Catalan President, Carles Puigdemont, and all his cabinet from their positions and freeing them of their duties (Diez, 2017). It was the first time ever, in Spanish democracy, that Article 155 was being used (Morales, 2018). Mariano Rajoy dissolved the Catalan Parliament and dismissed over 200 high-ranking officials. Immediately afterwards, the Spanish Prime Minister announced the call for autonomic elections for December 21.

On October 30, it was revealed that Carles Puigdemont and some of his cabinet had flown to Brussels and that they would be holding a press conference on the following day (Foffani, 2018). The press conference took place as announced, at which Puigdemont called for an international solution to the Catalan case. While he had received some international support, most of it came from politicians who were out of office, meaning they

were unfettered from having to be diplomatic and would therefore not compromise their own state with Spanish diplomacy by taking Puigdemont's side, while also condemning the Spanish state for the lack of dialogue. However, when it came to politicians currently in office, Puigdemont only received open support (with many nuances) from the first ministers of Belgium and Scotland. After the conference, some of his cabinet returned to Spain, but Puigdemont himself and his ministers, Meritxell Serret (agriculture), Toni Comín (health), Lluís Puig (culture), and Clara Ponsatí (education), remained in Brussels. This decision marked the beginning of the exile of almost half of the Catalan Government prior to their dismissal due to the application of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution. On November 2, 2017, the vice president of the Generalitat, Oriol Junqueras, and board members Jordi Turull, Josep Rull, Meritxell Borràs, Carles Mundó, Raül Romeva, Dolors Bassa and Joaquim Forn entered a remand prison, pending a formal trial on charges of rebellion, sedition, and embezzlement in relation to the declaration of independence by the Catalan Parliament on October 27. The cause of the imprisonment later became the general focus of the whole pro-independence movement that had so far been led by the Catalan Government.

Puigdemont and other members of his cabinet were also called to appear at the November 2 hearing, but a European arrest warrant was issued in their names since they had chosen to remain in Brussels. Puigdemont and his ministers hired the services of the globally renowned advocate Paul Bekaert, who was famous for his expertise in human rights and international conflicts. On his advice, they voluntarily presented themselves at a Belgian police station on November 5. Contrary to what had happened to their colleagues in Spain, the Catalan Government members in Brussels were released on the same day, on the condition that they should not leave Belgium pending the decision of a judge, who would decide whether to hand them over to Spanish justice. This decision was celebrated in Catalonia; and, on November 7, both the ANC and Òmnium called for a demonstration in Barcelona on November 11. According to the local police, this demonstration attracted 750,000 people. The Spanish judge from the Supreme Court, Pablo Llarena, who oversaw the case, withdrew the European arrest warrant a month later December 5, before the Belgian judge could determine whether to hand them over to Spanish justice and on which charges. Llarena, however, kept the Spanish arrest warrant in place, just in case Puigdemont and his colleagues ever attempted to return to Spain. Should this happen, they would be immediately detained and brought before the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, in the middle of this anomalous situation, Catalan parliamentary elections to the Generalitat were held on December 21, as ordered by Spanish Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, after the application of Article 155. The JxSí pro-independence coalition between the CDC and ERC that had overseen the Generalitat until 2015 was not repeated this time in the hope that a separate representation by the parties would attract more support. After all, CDC was seen as centre-right, and ERC as centre-left. Therefore, the separation was understood to be a positive move. Their promise was to form a government together once more if a majority was possible. The turnout for the December 21, 2017, elections was 81.09%, the highest in the history of parliamentary elections in Catalonia. The pro-republic bloc (JxCat, ERC and CUP) won with 47.5% of the votes and 70 seats, compared to the 43.47% of the votes and 57 seats won by the self-styled constitutionalists parties (Ciudadanos, PSOE, and PP). The Catalan Podemos, a part of the CeC coalition who expressed a desire not to be counted with any of the blocs, achieved 7.46% of the votes and eight seats. The most successful list in terms of votes, however, was that of Ciudadanos, with 25.35% of the votes followed by JxCat (21.66%), ERC (21.38%), PSC (13.88%), CeC (7.46%), CUP (4.46%) and, in the last place, Partido Popular (4.24%). In this way, the pro-independence parties won the elections again, gaining an absolute majority in the Catalan Parliament for the second time in a row (the first was in 2015).

On March 25, 2018, the President of the Generalitat de Catalunya, Carles Puigdemont, was arrested by the authorities on the German side of the Germany–Denmark border. Supreme Court Judge Pablo Llarena had reactivated the arrest warrant for Puigdemont and other Catalan politicians who had gone into exile. Puigdemont, who was in Finland, was trying to travel back to Brussels by road, but he was intercepted by German police officers just before he arrived in Belgium. The exiled president of the Generalitat was taken into police custody in Neumünster Prison. On the following day, he was brought before the German justice system, which was awaiting a decision for his extradition to Spain - the last time the German authorities handed over a President of the Generalitat in Spain was in 1940, when the Gestapo stopped Lluís Companys, who was subsequently executed by the Franco regime. On Tuesday, March 27, the other exiled politicians, namely Toni Comín, Lluís Puig, and Meritxell Serret, voluntarily handed themselves over to the Belgian courts. The Belgian judge who heard them, however, did not take any preventative measures, letting them escape scot-free once more, as had happened with the previous warrant issued in November. The following day, Clara Ponsatí, who had moved to his official residence in Scotland a few days before, also surrendered to the British authorities. He was released on the same day on the assumption that no extra measures were needed. This decision challenged the Spanish courts once more, which had imprisoned the Catalan Government on November 2 before the organisation of any trial.

The attorneys of the exiled government, now in Scotland, Belgium, and Germany, actively denied the causes under which the European warrant had been issued by the Spanish courts, and they were all convinced that the European justice would drop the causes for all the exiled members. On April, 2018, the Oberlandesgericht in the German state of Schleswig- Holstein ruled that Puigdemont would not be extradited on charges of rebellion and released him on bail. The German court would continue to investigate the embezzlement cause. Puigdemont declared that he would move to Berlin to become a resident there, while actively campaigning for the Catalan Republic from his new home, until he could return to either Belgium or Catalonia. The of Schleswig-Holstein resolution angered the Spanish government and the Spanish media, who began campaigning and pressuring their German counterparts in a vain attempt to have the German court reconsider their resolution. A few weeks later, the Spanish courts send more documents to Germany, to demonstrate the charges of rebellion and embezzlement. And once again, the Schleswig- Holstein court promised to investigate the matter and take a final decision soon. Meanwhile, in May, the Belgium court rejected the extradition of Toni Comín, Meritxell Serret and Lluís Puig under the premise that the European arrest warrant issued by Spain was incorrect, and therefore it did not meet the necessary requirements for its processing. This meant that Toni Comín, Meritxell Serret and Lluís Puig were free, from that moment on, to move freely throughout Europe, but not in Spain, where the national arrest warrant is still active. Once more, the Spanish media outlet (both left and right-wing media) took it very badly and began a series of attacks on Belgium.

In July 2018, the Schleswig-Holstein court made the decision to extradite Puigdemont to Spain only for the crime of embezzlement, ruling out any possibility to judge him for rebellion. Because of this, the Spanish Supreme Court rejected the extradition, as the sentence for embezzlement is far less than that of rebellion, and therefore not judging Puigdemont for rebellion would have made it very difficult for the Spanish court to hold the same charge for the rest of his imprisoned government. The European arrest warrant was dismantled altogether, setting Puigdemont in Germany, Ponsatí in Scotland, and Serret, Comín and Puig in Belgium, all free. However, the Spanish arrest warrant remains in effect, and Puigdemont and the other exiled members could still be arrested if they re-entered Spanish territory. Once the European arrest warrant was dropped, Puigdemont returned to his home in Brussels to continue the fight for independence from there, alongside Puig, Serret and Comín. Clara Ponsatí returned to her previous life in Scotland, as a full-time professor in the University of St Andrews. As of April 2020, they all remain at Belgium and Scotland respectively. The European Parliament in October 2020 voted to strip immunity of Puigdemont, Comín and Ponsatí, which means that their extradition to Spain is possible again. This decision, however, was appealed, and the legal battle did not stop. Nevertheless, Puigdemont continued to be engaged in the politics of the European Union and even became an MEP. In 2021, Puigdemont was arrested in Italy under the European arrest warrant, but he was released on the same day due to his immunity against prosecution. The event highlighted the fact that the legal problems and issues are still a part of the lives of the exiled politicians. In Spain, the political situation changed with the new governments appointed which were more willing to talk. In June 2021, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez pardoned nine pro-independence Catalan politicians who had been imprisoned but the pardons did not include exiles. This action was considered as the step towards the de-escalation of the conflict and the preparation for the further talks regarding the status of Catalonia.

By mid-2024, Puigdemont and his comrades continue to stay in Belgium and Scotland to appeal to the international organizations for support. The EU is still split on the question of Catalan independence with some members supporting the Catalans' right to self-determination while others supporting the Spanish state sovereignty. The politicians in exile also use their status as MEPs to keep the Catalan issue in the international political arena and engage in different conferences and meetings to mobilise. The status remains rather unstable, and there are constant legal cases and political changes that define the fate of Catalonia's independence. The exiled leaders have remained relevant and have effectively utilized their exile status to keep the issue relevant and the debate over Catalonia's status an active part of European politics.

III. Hypothesis and Methodology

This article emphasizes the crucial role of Twitter in globalizing the Catalan separatist cause and aims to prove the following hypothesis: Despite having fewer followers and posting fewer tweets than Mariano Rajoy, Carles Puigdemont achieves higher engagement rates on Twitter, demonstrating that follower count and tweet volume do not directly correlate with engagement levels. Specifically, we aim to quantitatively demonstrate that the Catalan leader at the time, Carles Puigdemont, garnered significantly more attention than his Spanish counterpart, Mariano Rajoy, despite Rajoy's greater prominence, higher hierarchical status, and having twice as many followers (1.4M) as Puigdemont (790K).¹

¹ Numbers reflect their followers on 11 September 2017.

Our research employs both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to assess the Catalan independence movement and major events that transpired in the year 2017. The text provides an ethnographical analysis of three significant dates: The dates of the three incidents are September 11, October 1, and October 27 in the year 2017. This thematic analysis enables an appropriate academic context prior to the quantitative findings. After the theoretical framework is set, the qualitative analysis is conducted to support the main hypothesis. The gathering of qualitative data entailed the process of observing Twitter (now X) and noting down the tweets that were of concern. To achieve the quantitative study, a large number of tweets were collected by employing APIs to gather the data. From this dataset, several metrics were extracted such as the number of likes, number of retweets, number of responses, and engagement rate of the users. To determine the significance of the changes in the engagement level, we analysed the statistical significance. In addition, a brief textual analysis was conducted to highlight the relevance of these tweets from a discourse perspective.

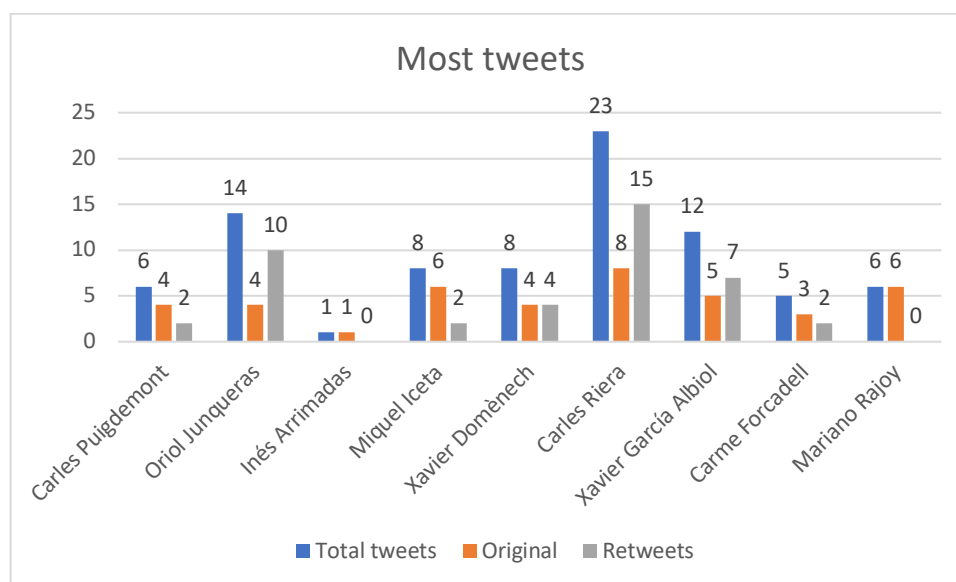
This study focuses on Twitter because politicians have been using it for communication for a long time (Fondevila-Gascón & Perelló-Sobrepere, 2014), it is considered the most popular social network for political communication (Stier et al., 2018), and it provides a favourable political communication context (Marqués, 2016). The Twitter activity of the selected Catalan and Spanish politicians was examined on September 11, October 1, and October 27, 2017 using the open-access tool Twitonomy. We looked at the tweets of Catalan parliamentary leaders Carles Puigdemont (JxCat), Oriol Junqueras (ERC), Inés Arrimadas (C's), Miquel Iceta (PSC), Xavier Domènech (ECP), Carles Riera (CUP), Xavier García Albiol (PP), the former President of the Catalan Parliament Carme Forcadell, and Spanish Prime, Mariano Rajoy. On September 11, 2017, Xavier Domènech (ECP) and Carles Riera (CUP) were not parliamentary leaders yet, but they were selected for the analysis because of their immediate activity as leaders of their respective parties in the December 21, 2017, Catalan elections.

IV. Results

We begin with an analysis of September 11, 2017, Catalonia's National Day and the fifth pro-independence demonstration in a row to have taken place on this day (following the Diada's celebration from 2012 to 2017). A strong emphasis is placed in comparing Puigdemont's numbers against those of Rajoy. Despite the latter being much more known, and having the double of Puigdemont's followers, the study observes how Puigdemont's tweets enjoyed much more engagement than Rajoy's. As a matter of fact, Carles Puigdemont became the most mentioned politician from all Spain in Twitter throughout the year 2017, which also stresses the importance of looking at his Twitter figures, especially during the three days that changed everything for Catalan politics: 11 September, 1 October, and 27 October 2017.

4.1. September 11, 2017

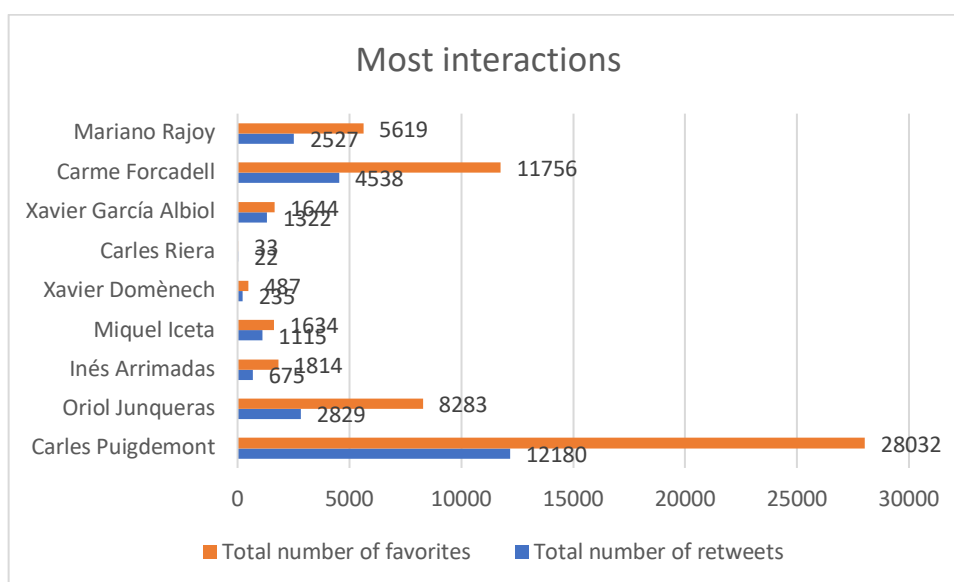
The following graphic shows the total number of tweets posted by the various political leaders under analysis. The first table that we feature indicates the total number of tweets, before dividing them into original tweets (self-written by the politician) and retweets (from other people).



Graphic 1. Self-elaborated by the authors. Source: X (formerly Twitter)²

On 11 September 2017, the most active Catalan politician out of all the candidates in the 21 December 2017 parliamentary elections was the left-wing Carles Riera (CUP), with a total of 23 tweets, eight of which were his and 15 of which were retweets from others. President Carles Puigdemont tweeted far less, only six times, and only two of these tweets were his own. Puigdemont's top tweet was "Thanks to all those who have made it possible again. Incredible! The best push for the referendum of #1Oct ☑ | #DiadaDelSi", with 5,006 retweets and 10,748 likes. It was also the tweet that received the most interactions on that day.

In the next graphic, we analyse the total number of interactions, including both favourites (likes) and retweets, of the above-mentioned politicians on the same day (September 11). As we will further see in this chapter, the total number of Carles Puigdemont's interactions exceed those of Mariano Rajoy's, who, despite having twice Puigdemont's followers, has interacted far less.



Graphic 2. Self-elaborated by the authors. Source: X (formerly Twitter)³

The totality of Puigdemont's tweets on 11 September amounted to 12,180 retweets and 28,032 likes. Out of the politicians that we analysed, only former President of the Catalan Parliament Carme Forcadell, who is now in jail, comes close to Puigdemont with 4,538 retweets and 11,756 likes. On the other hand, Spanish President Mariano Rajoy could only manage 2,527 retweets and 5,619 likes, even though he posted two more tweets than Puigdemont, and even though he had twice (1.4M) Puigdemont's followers (790K) at the time. This happens constantly with these two politicians, with Carles Puigdemont enjoying far more interactions than Mariano Rajoy when the two are compared on key days in Catalan politics – or at least on those days that we analysed.

The top tweet of Vice President Oriol Junqueras was a thank you message in English to Julian Assange, who had been very active in supporting the Referendum and the Catalan case overall. Junqueras tweeted: "Thank you, Julian, for shedding some light on the truth during such decisive days", earning himself 1,433 retweets and 2,966 likes. Assange's message itself got 14,247 retweets and 17,931 likes. The opposition leader, Inés Arrimadas, wrote: "Before the confrontation: union, good sense, and coexistence. Soon we will celebrate in Catalonia a Diada that represents us all #caminemosjuntos", which got 675 retweets and 1,807 likes. Her words implied that the Diada had been monopolized by pro-independence parties and that she hoped for a different kind of Diada. Miquel Iceta's tweets were unavailable at the time of data compilation, so we could not count his tweets in the study – although he did tweet. Xavier Domènech's top tweet was an extract from Els Segadors, the official national anthem of Catalonia. Xavier García Albiol tweeted a graphic that supposedly showed that the length of the demonstration was clearly shorter than the previous two had been (2015 and 2016), in what can be interpreted as an attempt to discredit the 2017 demonstration.

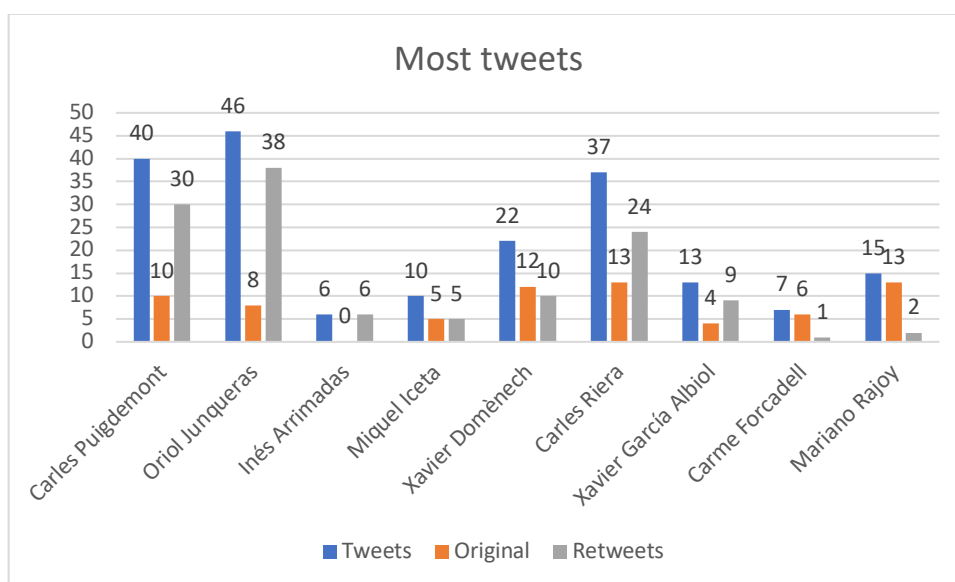
² Data was collected using the Twitonomy tool on 11 September 2017.

³ Data was collected using the Twitonomy tool on 11 September 2017.

It is noticeable that the PP leaders of both the Spanish and the Catalan parties never acknowledged the significance of the massive pro- independence demonstrations. Carles Riera tweeted that "even the firefighters" had joined the pro-independence movements, as well as saying, ironically, "Colau, only you are missing". This latter tweet was in reference to Barcelona's mayor, Ada Colau, who now rules Barcelona after winning the local elections with a coalition including, among others, the Catalan branch of Spanish Podemos. The then President of the Catalan Parliament, Carme Forcadell, was very explicit: "A new demonstration of the people's strength. All in all, everyone will vote on 1 October!", adding an aerial picture of the demonstration. Finally, she opted for a more institutional kind of tweet: "For a day of freedom, coexistence and respect for all Catalans. A happy day", declining to make any comment on the thousands of people protesting in the streets.

4.2. October 1, 2017

The second date that we chose to analyse was 1 October 2017, the day of the Catalan Referendum. This day was particularly meaningful for everything that occurred during the days leading up to the Referendum, as well as for another event that occurred on the very same date, i.e., clashes with the Spanish police in polling stations (schools) against peaceful voters. Most of the top tweets also refer to this aspect.



Graphic 3. Self-elaborated by the authors. Source: X (formerly Twitter)⁴

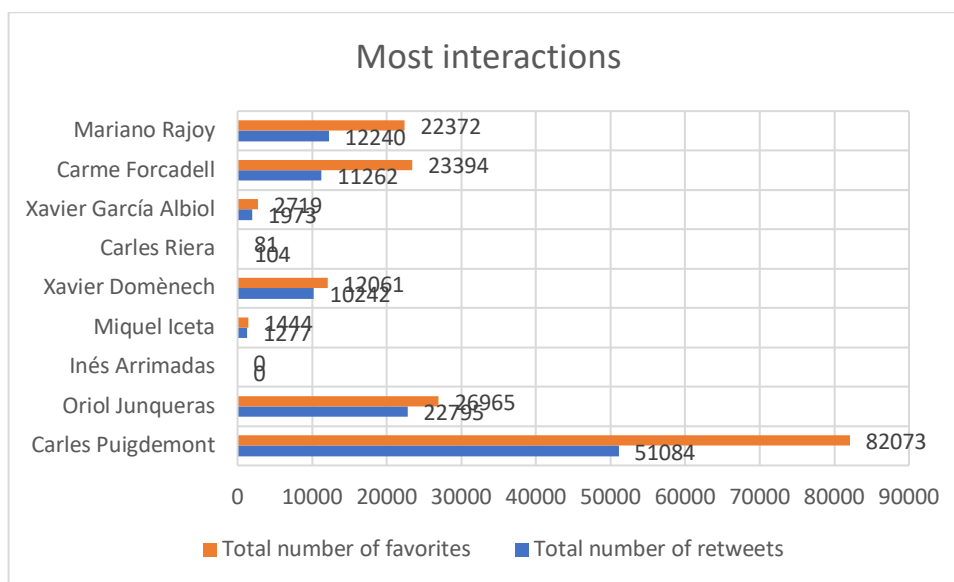
Of the three days analysed in this study, 1 October 2017 is the day that the politicians analysed posted the most tweets. It was certainly a day that shocked many due to Spanish police raids against voters in polling stations. It was this issue that clearly monopolized the entire day. Every politician that we analysed tweeted more than five times. For each of them, all five tweets concerned the Referendum in one way or another. As for the pro-independence leaders, most of these tweets directly address the violence of the Spanish police, receiving many retweets and likes.

On 1 October 2017, the most active Catalan politician was the left- wing Oriol Junqueras (ERC), who is currently imprisoned. He tweeted a total of 46 times, 38 of which were his own and only eight were retweets from other accounts. Carles Puigdemont comes in second at 40 tweets, 30 of which were original and 10 were retweets. As we will further see, each of them accomplished a great number of interactions. Also noticeable is Carles Riera, who usually does not tweet that much; however, on this day, he made an exception and tweeted 37 times: 13 were his own and 24 were retweets. The self-styled constitutionalist politicians, i.e., Arrimadas, Iceta, Albiol and Rajoy, were much quieter. In fact, the Spanish President had very little to tweet about, considering that he had spent most of September assuring the Spanish public that the Referendum would not take place – he even bragged that he had confiscated the ballots and ballot boxes.

However, he was proved wrong on 1 October by the many thousands of volunteers who had secretly kept the ballots and ballots boxes in their homes so that the Referendum could proceed under normal and regular

⁴ Data was collected with the Twitonomy tool on 1 October 2017.

conditions, as indeed it finally did. Junqueras' top tweet is in English, quoting CNN's headline "The shame of Europe" and providing a link to the article. This tweet alone gathered 5,499 retweets and 4,515 likes. His second top tweet is very explicit: "Help! Send information! Let the entire world know". He provides a link to the British newspaper The Guardian, which was asking for people's experiences of how the day was unfolding. Junqueras tweeted this at midday, when the Spanish police had already begun their violent raids of many schools. Finally, his third top tweet is a thank you message to Charles Michel, Prime Minister of Belgium, who had tweeted "Violence can never be the answer! We condemn all forms of violence and reaffirm our call for political dialogue", which earned him 17,066 retweets and 17,859 likes. In turn, Junqueras' quote of Michel's tweet got him 3,223 retweets and 3,857 likes.



Graphic 4. Self-elaborated by the authors. Source: X (formerly Twitter)⁵

Carles Puigdemont's top tweet reads "To you, who have taught the world the civility of a peaceful people, who have resisted vexations and repression, I thank you #1Oct".⁷ It continues over five more tweets, in which he affirms the rights of the Catalan people before the repression of the Spanish state. Inés Arrimadas did not tweet anything or quote anyone; she only retweeted others' posts. Socialist leader Miquel Iceta, who had given no legal value to the Referendum, said that he, along with his national leader (Pedro Sánchez), disagreed with the acts of the Spanish police, calling for those involved to take responsibility. Xavier Domènech, leader of the ECP, a party that includes the Catalan branch of Spain's Podemos, asked for Rajoy's resignation. Carles Riera (CUP) tweeted "Catalonia votes massively in peace, except for where the Spanish police have shown up".

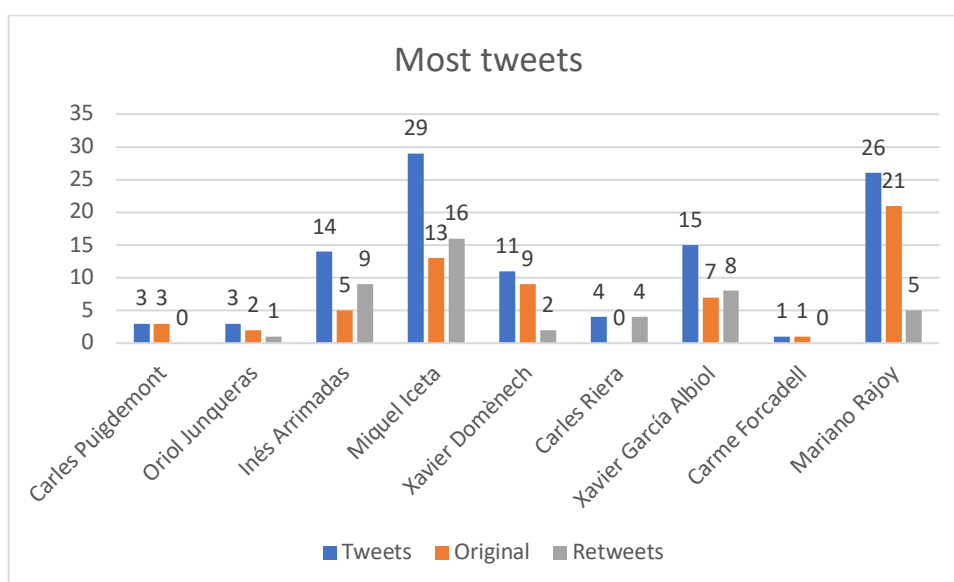
Xavier García Albiol, leader of the PPC (the Catalan branch of Spain's Partido Popular), did not tweet about the Spanish police raid, instead focusing on attacking President Carles Puigdemont and Vice President Oriol Junqueras. Carme Forcadell, President of the Catalan Parliament, thanked everyone for participating in the Referendum and criticized the disproportionate level of Spanish violence. In his turn, Mariano Rajoy's tweets focused on diminishing the day, his top tweet being "My duty is to enforce the la - I am the President of all Spaniards. I thank the Courts and the FCSE for their commitment to the Rule of Law". His words earned him 2,071 retweets and 4,655 likes, much less than the tweets of Puigdemont or Junqueras, although they each had half the number of Rajoy's followers.

4.3 October 27, 2017

In compliance with the Law on the Referendum, and a few days later than expected, Carles Puigdemont communicated on 10 October to the plenary session of the Parliament of Catalonia that he was assuming "the mandate of the people for Catalonia to become an independent State in the form of a republic". Immediately after, he proposed the suspension of the effects of the declaration of independence so that, in the coming weeks, a dialogue could exist between the Catalan and Spanish Governments. This declaration was met with scepticism, as Puigdemont used an ambiguous formula in his speech. Precisely because of this, the Spanish Government asked him twice, via formal letter, if he had declared independence or not. Both times, Puigdemont answered the letter

⁵ Data was collected using the Twitonomy tool on 1 October 2017.

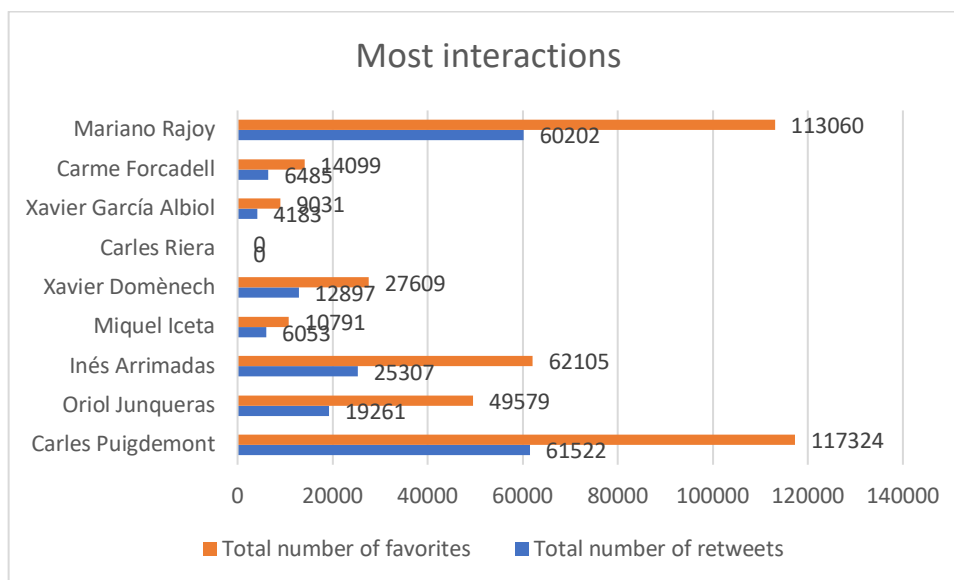
while maintaining his ambiguous rhetoric, which prompted Rajoy's cabinet to initiate the mechanisms for the application of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution to Catalonia, which could mean the suspension of its autonomy. On 26 October, the day before the Spanish Senate was due to discuss and pass the application of Article 155, Carles Puigdemont summoned a meeting with his government members at the Generalitat to discuss whether to dissolve the Parliament and convene new elections, or whether lift the suspension of the declaration of independence and bring it into effect. Much has been written about this day: the secret meetings and calls, mediation offers from impartial and internationally renowned figures. But the only thing to come out of it for Carles Puigdemont is that no one from the Spanish Government could guarantee him that, if he called for elections, Article 155 would be stopped and therefore not applied to Catalonia. Consequently, he opted to summon the Catalan Parliament on the next day, 27 October, to cast their vote on the declaration of independence. The resolution, which included the declaration of independence of Catalonia, was approved on the 27 October by a secret ballot method. Almost at the same time, the Senate in Madrid approved the application of Article 155.



Graphic 5. Self-elaborated by the authors. Source: X (formerly Twitter)⁶

On this day, there was a huge difference between the behaviour of the pro-independence leaders on Twitter and that of the constitutionalist leaders. Also, there was a huge difference in the total number of messages posted by Puigdemont and Rajoy. On the one hand, Puigdemont only tweeted three times, all of them being original messages. On the other, Rajoy tweeted a total of 26 times, 21 of these being original tweets and five being retweets. Oddly enough, Puigdemont's three tweets got more retweets and likes than Rajoy's 26 tweets.

⁶ Data was collected using the Twitonomy tool on 27 October 2017.



Graphic 6. Self-elaborated by the authors. Source: X (formerly Twitter)⁷

Puigdemont's top tweet reads "Catalonia is and will be a land of freedom. At the service of its people. In difficult times and in times of celebration. Now more than ever". It got 36,151 retweets and 70,853 likes. Puigdemont's second most popular tweet of the day is a reply to Donald Tusk. The president to the European Council had tweeted "For the EU, nothing changes. Spain remains our only interlocutor. I hope the Spanish Government will favour the force of argument, not the argument of force", to which Puigdemont replied, in English, "As you know, Catalans always favour the force of argument. #peace #democracy #dialogue". This tweet gained 15,404 retweets and 26,479 likes. Puigdemont's third and last tweet of the day was another reply, this time to Charles Michel, Prime Minister of Belgium. Michel tweeted: "A political crisis can only be solved through dialogue. We call for a peaceful solution with respect for national and international order", to which Puigdemont replied: "Dialogue has been, and will always be, our choice to solve political situations and achieve peaceful solutions". His tweet earned 9,892 retweets and 19,867 likes.

Now, we move onto the Spanish President, Mariano Rajoy. While Puigdemont only tweeted three times, Rajoy tweeted 21 times; 26 if you count his five retweets. Rajoy's top tweet is very institutional: "I ask that all Spaniards remain calm. The Rule of Law will restore legality in Catalonia". This tweet got 31,190 retweets and 50,180 likes. While this number is a lot, it is still far from the figures for Puigdemont's top tweets, especially in terms of likes (Puigdemont's top tweet got 36,151 retweets and 70,853 likes). Despite having double Puigdemont's followers, and despite having tweeted seven times more than Puigdemont, Rajoy came in (a close) second in terms of total retweets and total likes, as can be seen in Graphic 6. Rajoy's second tweet explains the approval of Article 155: "The Government takes measures to prevent the inadmissible kidnapping of the Catalans and the theft of part of their territory from the rest of Spaniards". This one got 3,836 retweets and 9,176 likes. Finally, Rajoy's third most popular tweet of the day explains the first measures to be taken by Article 155: "The President of the Generalitat, his government and the general director of the Mossos will be stopped; Delegations will be closed abroad", with 3,327 retweets and 6,694 likes.

Vice President Oriol Junqueras is very explicit in his tweet: "Yes. We have gained the freedom to build a new country". He got 16,399 retweets and 37,434 likes. CUP leader Carles Riera did not tweet at all on this day. Carme Forcadell, President of the Catalan Parliament, was very institutional, tweeting "The @parlament_cat plenary approves the resolution on the declaration of the representatives of Catalonia", attaching a photo of the resolution that had just been approved. Her tweet got 6,479 retweets and 14,083 likes. The leader of the opposition, Inés Arrimadas, acknowledging the newly announced Catalan parliamentary elections, tweeted "Catalans, let's vote massively in the upcoming elections to recover democracy, institutions and the future of our children", which got 7,661 retweets and 15,966 likes. Miquel Iceta also stressed the call for the elections in his top tweet: "On this saddest of days, due to the mistaken and irresponsible decision of the pro-independence parties, a ray of light: #21D Elections", with 1,910 retweets and 3,494 likes. The PP leader in Catalonia, Xavier García Albiol, tweeted: "After the coup d'état in Catalonia @marianorajoy will restore democracy and the courts will put the coup leaders

⁷ Data was collected using the Twitonomy tool on 27 October 2017.

in their place", which earned him 1,347 retweets and 2,781 likes. ECP leader Xavier Domènech blamed Rajoy for the fallout and asked for new pacts. This got 4,811 retweets and 7,446 likes.

V. The aftermath

Following Catalonia's declaration of independence in 2017, Spain has experienced notable political, legal, and social consequences, with a particular emphasis on the separatist leaders in Catalonia. Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, leading the Spanish Government, promptly utilized Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution to dissolve the Catalan Government. This measure reinstated a regional administration under Spanish jurisdiction, with the purpose of thwarting future secession aspirations and facilitating new elections in Catalonia. The outcome of these elections led to the formation of another government that supports independence, thus exacerbating the tensions between Catalonia and Spain. An important occurrence was the reaction of the Spanish judiciary to the declaration of independence. The Spanish authorities initiated judicial proceedings against prominent individuals involved in the Catalan independence movement, charging them with insurrection, sedition, and misappropriation of public funds. Prominent individuals targeted included the former president of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont, as well as members of his government. Puigdemont sought refuge in Belgium to evade apprehension, whereas individuals such as Oriol Junqueras confronted legal action and incarceration. The legal processes ignited both domestic and international discourse on the validity and appropriateness of the charges. Proponents of Catalan independence contended that the leaders were under persecution due of their political convictions.

Judge Pablo Llarena from the Spanish Supreme Court was tasked with investigating and prosecuting these individuals, and he issued European arrest warrants for Puigdemont and other individuals. In 2018, Belgian judges rejected Spain's extradition request, alleging political motives. The European Court of Justice upheld this perspective in 2020, and the German Supreme Court similarly dismissed Spain's extradition request in 2021, citing legal inadequacies. In January 2023, the legal experts of the European Parliament expressed additional concerns with the Spanish Supreme Court's decision to ignore Puigdemont's immunity. Simultaneously, Judge Manuel Marchena presided over the 2019 trial of other Catalan independence leaders who were held in custody as a precautionary measure. The Supreme Court convicted them and imposed prison sentences for their involvement in the 2017 independence attempt, which caused extensive protests in Catalonia. Protesters denounced what they perceived as excessive and authoritarian suppression by the Spanish government. The incarceration of Catalan lawmakers garnered substantial scrutiny from international media and political dignitaries. A great number of foreign organizations and human rights groups, such as Amnesty foreign, have condemned the sentences as excessive and have demanded the release of the leaders. They argue that the leaders' activities were politically motivated and non-violent.

In the year 2018, Pedro Sánchez came to power as President of the Government of Spain on June 2, 2018. He replaced Mariano Rajoy after a motion of censure that was approved by the Congress of Deputies on June 1, 2018. The Spanish government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, remained resolute in its opposition to Catalan independence, despite increasing demands for engagement and negotiation. The administration led by Sánchez prioritized the maintenance of the Spanish Constitution and the preservation of national unity, while also ensuring adherence to the rule of law and safeguarding judicial independence. Despite attempts to reduce tensions, the matter of Catalan independence remained the central focus of Spanish politics and society. The independence movement persisted, with continuous rallies, marches, and symbolic acts of resistance. The polarization of public sentiment in Catalonia and the rest of Spain has a profound impact on electoral outcomes and governmental strategies.

In the summer of 2023, as Catalan pro-independence leaders were still being prosecuted, Spain had its national elections. In order to secure a second term as Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez required the backing of minor regional parties, including those advocating for Catalan independence. The pro-independence groups ERC and Junts stipulated amnesty as a condition for their support, seeking legal immunity for individuals implicated in the pursuit of independence. In November 2023, Sánchez successfully obtained a second term by accepting the amnesty, while facing resistance from far-right parties and the media. The amnesty bill, which will take effect in June 2024, pertains to 400 individuals who are connected to the independence referendums in 2014 and 2017, as well as other instances associated with the Catalan independence movement that have occurred since then.

VI. Conclusion

The quantitative results of this study provide valuable information about the Twitter activity of Carles Puigdemont and Mariano Rajoy during critical periods in Catalan politics in 2017. While Carles Puigdemont has less than half the number of followers as Mariano Rajoy, he received a greater number of interactions, which can be expressed through such indicators as retweets, likes, comments, etc. This discovery contradicts the traditional

belief that a big number of followers will always lead to high engagement. Further, the results indicate that Rajoy was more active in tweeting than Puigdemont, meaning that the latter posted fewer tweets than the former. However, it was found that for the same number of tweets, the interactions per tweet were higher for Puigdemont. This shows that the quality and the relevance of the content, and the emotions and the politics that it stirs among the audience are some of the most important factors that determine engagement on social media. The present research thus offers strong evidence to the fact that more does not necessarily mean better. Thus, the impact of social media communication and its efficiency depends on the ability to reach the audience and engage in meaningful interaction. The way Puigdemont uses Twitter is quite effective, as he focuses on the powerful and evocative messages, which proves that social media can be a very efficient tool in political communication and organization. These conclusions are relevant for the analysis of the processes of political communication on social media. They recommend that political actors and institutions should concentrate on creating high-quality and timely messages instead of the quantity of messages or the number of followers. Further research could focus on the characteristics of the tweets that have been posted by Puigdemont and which have received more engagement and how such insights can be used in other contexts and on other platforms. These implications are not limited to the online environment but are a continuation of the political conflict and the role of social networks in forming public opinion. While observing the further development of political communication, the experience of Puigdemont's use of Twitter can be considered as useful and informative when it comes to the application of social media in political activities.

Bibliography

- [1]. Almirón, N. (2019). 'Go and get'em!': Authoritarianism, Elitism and Media in the Catalan crisis. *The Political Economy of Communication*, 6(2).
- [2]. Barceló, J. (2018). Batons and ballots: The effectiveness of state violence in fighting against Catalan separatism. *Research & Politics*, 5(2), 2053168018781747.
- [3]. Caspersen, N., & Qvortrup, M., & Turp, D. & Welp, Y. (2017). *The Catalan Independence Referendum: An assessment of the process of self-determination*. Quebec: Irai
- [4]. CatSalut (2017) Informe sobre els incidents dels dies 1 al 4 d'octubre de 2017 pacients atesos durant la jornada electoral i dies posteriors a conseqüència de les carregues dels cossos policials de l'estat. Barcelona, Spain: Departament de Salut, Generalitat de Catalunya.
- [5]. Cetrà, D., Casanas-Adam, E., & Tàrrega, M. (2018). The 2017 Catalan independence referendum: A symposium. *Scottish affairs*, 27(1), 126-143.
- [6]. Cramer, Kathryn. 2015. Political Power and Civil Counterpower: The Complex Dynamics of the Catalan Independence Movement. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 21: 104–20.
- [7]. Della Porta, Donatella, Francis O'Connor, Martin Portos, and Anna Subirats Ribas. 2017. *Social Movements and Referendums from Below: Direct Democracy in the Neoliberal Crisis*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- [8]. Dowling, Andrew. 2017. *The Rise of Catalan Independence: Spain's Territorial Crisis*. London: Routledge.
- [9]. Dubois, P., & Villeneuve-Siconnelly, K. (2019). Framing Catalonia: Evidence from Québec media. *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies*, 11(2), 227-247.
- [10]. Foffani, L. (2018). The Case Puigdemont: The Stress-Test of the European Arrest Warrant. *EuCLR European Criminal Law Review*, 8(2), 196-200.
- [11]. Fondevila-Gascón, J. F., & Perelló-Sobrepere, M. (2014). The rise of Twitter in the Latin American landscape: a study of the most followed accounts in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, and Venezuela. *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias de la Comunicación*, 10(19).
- [12]. Giori, Paolo. 2017. *Cataluña-Québec. Nacionalismo, Sociedad Civil y Cultura Popular en el Siglo XX*. Ph.D. thesis, Universitat de Girona, Girona, Spain.
- [13]. Humlebæk, C., & Hau, M. F. (2020). From National Holiday to Independence Day: Changing Perceptions of the "Diada". *Genealogy*, 4(1), 31.
- [14]. Keating, Michael. 2001. *Nations against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia, and Scotland*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- [15]. Keating, Michael. 2008. Thirty Years of Territorial Politics. *West European Politics* 31: 60–81.
- [16]. López Bofill, H. (2019). Hubris, constitutionalism, and "the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation": The repression of Catalan secessionist referenda in Spanish constitutional law. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 17(3), 943-969.
- [17]. Lupien, P. A. (2020). El dia de la música: The Digital Organization of the 2017 Catalan Referendum. *Digitalization of Society and Socio-political Issues 2: Digital, Information and Research*, 79-92.
- [18]. Marqués, J. (2016). *Política y propaganda: medios de comunicación y opinión pública*. Editorial UOC.
- [19]. Morales, M. J. G. (2018). Federal execution, Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, and the crisis in Catalonia. *Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht*, 73(4), 791-830.
- [20]. Nichols, D. (2017). Catalonia referendum: The people's insurrection against the Spanish state. *Green Left Weekly*, (1155), 15.
- [21]. Pascal, M. (2022). The role of the civil society in the Catalan political process (2012–2021). *American Behavioral Scientist*, 00027642221078761.
- [22]. Perelló-Sobrepere, M. (2017). Building a New State from Outrage: The Case of Catalonia. In *Handbook of Research on Citizen Engagement and Public Participation in the Era of New Media* (pp. 344-359). IGI Global.
- [23]. Perelló-Sobrepere, M. (2018). The Catalan Case: Building a New State from Social Outrage and New Media. In *From Tahrir Square to Ferguson: Social Networks as Facilitators of Social Movements* (pp. 251-268). Peter Lang.
- [24]. Requejo, F., & Sanjaume-Calvet, M. (2019). Independence referendums. Catalonia in perspective. *Catalan Social Sciences Review*, (9), 1-18.
- [25]. Stier, S., Bleier, A., Lietz, H., & Strohmaier, M. (2018). Election campaigning on social media: Politicians, audiences, and the mediation of political communication on Facebook and Twitter. *Political communication*, 35(1), 50-74.