

Political discourses and intolerance toward migrants in Catalonia

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Spain has become a pole of attraction for immigration in Europe and has received almost 5 million immigrants since 2000. But unlike other European countries, no important extreme-right party in terms of electoral results has existed in the country since the re-establishment of a democratic regime at the end of the 1970s. Spanish policy towards immigrants settled in the country has been fairly progressive, in particular because migration was considered to be beneficial for the Spanish labour market and welfare system.

But the financial crisis experienced by the country since 2008 is creating a new context for the management of migration and cultural diversity issues. During the last two years, the public discourse on migration has developed along anti-immigrant and intolerant overtones, especially in Catalonia.

This should be a source of concern at Catalan, Spanish and European levels. As an emerging issue, a major and quick political commitment of political actors, the media and civil society can in our view be effective to halt expressions of racism and intolerance and to regulate the use of anti-immigrant statements in the political life.

This policy brief presents the diffusion of intolerant discourse in Catalonia, especially during controversies related to the management of diversity at local level. It focuses on the role of political parties and provides key messages for policy makers on how to contain anti-immigrant political discourses.

Spain has become in few years the first country of immigration in Europe

2004-2008 : a positive discourse on migrants.

A new situation since the financial crisis

Urgent need to fight the intolerant political discourses on migration emerging in Catalonia

Evidence & Analysis (Key Findings)

Anti-immigrant and intolerant political discourses are increasingly occupying space in the political life of Spain. The country has been characterized by a fairly tolerant attitude toward migrant accommodation in the years 2000. Yet, the financial crisis and the shortage of jobs and welfare have led political actors to present migrants and locals as competitors. They increasingly test the ‘red lines’ of anti-immigrants discourse. It touches primarily Catalonia which is one of the historical land of reception of migrants and which has a greater share of non-European and non-Latino American immigrants. We provide data and analysis of the new migration context in Spain and on the particularities of Catalonia within this framework. We proceed then by a presentation of local controversies and finally, analyze strategies and discourses of political parties – extreme-right and mainstream parties.

A new stage for migration in Spain and Catalonia

Spain is entering in a new era regarding migration. It experiences stability in migration flows since 2009. The majority of immigrants are living in the country since five years or more and natives with immigrant parents also increase. Yet, the new economic cycle is affecting more migrants than natives. More immigrants have lost their job, especially because they were concentrated in sectors affected primarily by the crisis. 37% immigrants were unemployed in the first quarter of 2012 and their activity rate dropped from 68,3% at the end of 2006 to 53,5% at the end of 2009.

The country had based an important part of its policies and political discourses during the years 2004-2008, on the idea that migration was positive because it was useful and profitable for Spanish economy and social security. The economic situation and shortage of resources, raise major political challenges for the country’s management of diversity.

The case of Catalonia

Recent intolerant discourses and the economic situation are challenging previously successful policies for migrant integration

Table 1
Number of immigrants and main countries of origin
in Catalonia, Madrid and Spain (2012)

	Immigrants	1 st country of origin	2 nd country of origin	3 rd country of origin	4 th country of origin
Catalonia	15,6% 1.185.852	Morocco 236.991	Romania 101.905	Ecuador 68.880	Bolivia 52.485
Madrid	16.4% 1.067.785	Romania 219.095	Ecuador 113.824	Morocco 86.263	Peru 58.137
Spain	12.2% 5.751.487	Romania 865.707	Morocco 773.995	UK 391.194	Ecuador 360.710

Political intolerance toward migrants in Catalonia

Intolerant discourses have risen in Catalonia since 2010 but not in other regions of Spain. Possible reasons are:

- The presence of an already constituted anti-immigrant political party, the Platform for Catalonia, since 2003.

- The Popular party's constant role in opposition (as the regional *Convergència i Unió* is always strongest among conservative parties in Catalonia): studies have shown that the fact that the PP remains in minority has led the party to radicalize its discourse and take a tougher stance on migration issues.

- The fact that the proportion of African and Muslims immigrants is greater than in other parts of Spain.

Catalan policy toward migrants is fairly open in comparison with other European countries. Even if migration management is centralized and takes place at the State level, Catalonia has developed a comprehensive immigrant policy, with a strong emphasis on integration via employment and the building of a common culture of which Catalan language is a pillar.

The *National Agreement on immigration*, policy document signed in December 2008 by the administration, political groups and civil society representatives has been perceived as a model for the design of integrative policies of accommodation. But its implementation in times of economic crisis has been suspended in many domains for lack of resources. Migration and diversity management is no longer a priority for policy makers who have to deal with the effects of the crisis.

Three recent controversies Several controversies in relation with migration occurred in Catalonia in the years 2010-2011. They have sparked off intolerant political discourses which present different ways to frame "conflicts" related to migration. They progressively stretched the limits of intolerance in Catalan context.

1. Exclusion of unauthorized migrants from the city census (padrón) in the city of Vic

In January 2010, the city council of Vic (Barcelona province, pop. 40.000) voted the ban of unauthorized migrants from the city census (padrón). It is the only way for them to access public welfare provisions and services (health, education, social services...). In Spain, this registration is a right and a duty no matter the administrative situation. The ban has raised an important debate in Spain about the right of municipalities to do so and about the possibility for undocumented immigrants to access basic rights

2. "Anti-Roma campaign" in the city of Badalona

During Catalan and local elections in 2010 and 2011, the Popular party in Catalonia has focused its campaign on the need for a tough policy toward migrants. Its candidate for mayor in Badalona (pop. 215,000), a close suburb of Barcelona, issued a flyer associating migrants and especially Romanian Roma to insecurity and dirtiness and also made repeated statements with this same explicit association. Two associations sued him for the flyer but he has been acquitted as freedom of speech prevailed. He won the local election and is now the mayor of the town since May 2011.

3. "Burqa" ban proposals in the city of Lleida and across Catalonia (June 2010)

In June 2010, several towns of Catalonia decided to vote bans for the wearing of religious veils covering the face, such as *burqa* and *niqab*, in public buildings. The first and most publicized case has been the one of the provincial capital of Lleida (pop. 131.000), ruled by the socialist party, and which ban has raised contention across the country. In this case, the contention was whether the ban proposals were stigmatizing migrants or, conversely, decisions enlightened by human rights values and ensuring security.

Intolerance in Catalan political discourse

Intolerant discourses which emerged during these controversies and during the electoral campaigns (at local, Catalan and Spanish levels) in 2010-2011, frame differently what can and cannot be tolerated as regards to migration in Catalonia. In general, these discourses argue that tolerance toward migrants and the recognition of migrants' beliefs and practices put at risk the cohesion of local society and its values.

Three principal discourses have been identified in our research.

- The perception of migration as bringing insecurity, delinquency and problems of coexistence.
- The perception of migration as a threat for the cultural homogeneity of Catalonia.
- The perception of migrants as competitors with locals for limited resources.

A common feature of these discourses is that migration is perceived as undermining the social cohesion and norms of civility that are attached to the local society. They tend to present most migrants as "radical others" who are not able or willing to assimilate in the society. These discourses tend to redefine the Catalan citizenship along ethnic lines, instead of the civic definition that has prevailed over years.



Anti-immigrant discourse and security Flyer of PP in Badalona, April 2010

Translation:

Title: "+ Security"

"Delinquency" "Insecurity" "Incivility" "Dirtiness"
"Is your neighborhood safe?"

"I need only 2 councilors to win local elections. If I am mayor in 2012 I promise that:

We will be able to go out in the neighborhood without being harassed or attacked.

Whoever lives in Badalona will have to adapt to our norms and customs."

The top right picture stating "we do not want Romanians" has been subject to controversy.

Political parties at stake

While some political discourses express non-tolerance to practices and values of migrants they deem problematic, **others go beyond intolerance** to argue for rejection or hate toward (groups of) migrants or religious minorities (Muslims) per se.

Emergence of the radical-right

One important concern in Catalonia relates to the emergence and growth of a new radical-right political party named the Platform for Catalonia (PxC). PxC is an **explicit anti-immigrant party and targets mainly Muslims** and immigrant residents with a Muslim background. It has been created in 2002 and although its electoral scores are still weak, its **audience is growing fast** from an election to the next, especially at local level. It has also been **especially active in mobilizations** and in creating unrest in neighborhoods with anti-immigrant propaganda.

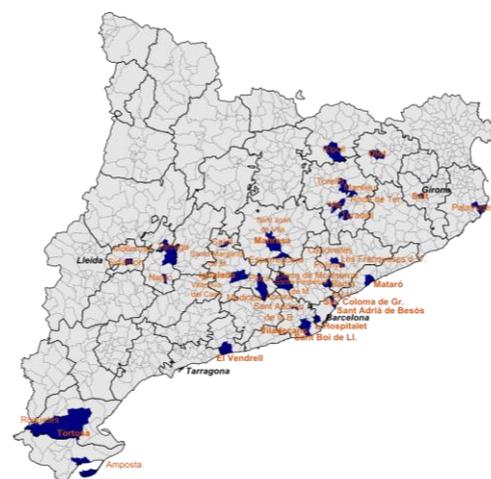
The PxC has participated actively to major neighbors protests against the building of Mosques; distributes brochures with falsenesses about migration such as a fictitious letter supposedly written by migrants to thank the local government for prioritizing them over the locals in Vic, a fictitious check supposedly addressed to migrants by the Catalan administration in Mataró (see picture), or spreading the false announcement of the building of a Mosque on the old bullring of Barcelona.

Anti-immigrant flyer of PxC representing a fictitious check addressed by the Catalan administration to an immigrant (May 2010)



In 2007, PxC obtained 17 elected representatives at municipal level and 67 at the last municipal elections of May 2011. They also tried to enter the Catalan Parliament in the past elections of November 2010, without obtaining political representation, but very near to have it with 75.134 votes representing a 2.4%. It also extended its electorate **from rural regions of Catalonia toward the suburbs** of the metropolitan area of Barcelona, both receiving an important foreign immigration since 2000.

Cities with councilors of the Platform for Catalonia (2011)



In bold: cities > pop. 30,000

Table 1
Evolution of the electoral results of the Platform for Catalonia (2003-2011)

	2003	2006	2007	2010	2011
Local elections (%)	0,1		0,45		2,3
<i>Number of local councilors</i>	4		17		67
Catalan elections (%)	0,15	N/A		2,4	
General elections (in Catalonia) (%)					1,7

Intolerance in mainstream parties

The case studies demonstrate that non-tolerance towards immigrants is also **increasingly expressed by mainstream parties**. The analysis of controversies about migration management and the analysis of the electoral campaigns of 2010-2011, highlight the trivialization of intolerance which has become an ordinary component of political debates about migration. At the same time, positions of civil society and anti-racist organizations are constantly under attack for being too lenient towards migrants.

Two dimensions have been highlighted in order to explain the emergence of intolerant discourses and the trivialization of non-tolerance in Catalonia.

- **Electioneering strategies and denial of racism:** the electoral success, even limited, of politicians with a tough discourse on migration has increased intolerance as an electioneering strategy. The problem is that electioneering appears as a way for politicians to minimize the importance of racism and anti-immigrant discourses in political life.

- **Local autonomy and intra-party competition:** When it comes to discourses toward migrants, political leaders argue about the local autonomy and the primacy of local context to justify anti-immigrant stances of local politicians. The importance of anti-immigrant stances are constantly minimized and personalized, while political parties as organizations do not endorse nor condemn firmly these discourses. Conflicting streams and interests within parties also explain the difficulty to regulate discourses on migration and implement sanctions.

This shift towards tougher positions on immigration of mainstream parties legitimizes anti-immigrant parties. In addition, the lack of commitment of other parties in delegitimizing anti-immigrant discourses is also legitimizing the extreme-right.

A growing public concern over intolerant discourses: the public response.

The concern over the rise of anti-immigrant discourses and policies in Catalonia has led the Advisory council of social and family policies (Consell Assessor de Polítiques Socials i Familiars) of the Catalan government to produce a report presenting a state of the problem and policy recommendations. Written in January and made public in July 2012, the report acknowledges the efforts made by the public administration in the building of a common culture integrating diversity. However it highlights the rise of discourses and attitudes inciting to racism and harming human rights.

The council proposes to implement the objective of the 2009 National agreement on Immigration (PNI), notably in order to build a culture of diversity.

It suggests:

- That political parties sign a commitment for the non-instrumental utilisation of migration, especially in political campaigns.
- That this commitment be followed by the commission in charge of the implementation of the PNI.
- To develop a pedagogical discourse on migration.
- To establish legal and social mechanisms which enable an actual opposition to racist discourses.
- To establish an ethic code for political, institutional, media and civil society discourses.

Source: CASPIP (2012), *La situació del discurs polític sobre la immigració i la diversitat a Catalunya. Propostes per a promoure una cultura pública de la diversitat*, Adopted the 27 January 2012, Generalitat de Catalunya.

Key Messages for Policy Makers

Innovative programmes on rumours and falseness about migration.

Anti-racist campaigns that have been implemented in Catalonia since 2009 focus mainly on fighting rumors, hackneyed subjects and stereotypes attached to migrant and migration. These campaigns have been developed by anti-racist organizations and retaken by the city of Barcelona and then the Catalan administration through the “anti-rumors network¹”. This one presents data and laws that explain the falseness of hackneyed subjects about migrants (“they steal our jobs”, “they do not pay taxes”...). These campaigns are also part of the more general effort toward the building of a so-called “common global culture” in Catalonia.

This policy can be considered as a model at Spanish level. It has to be maintained and disseminated widely to the population. Anti-racist organizations such as SOS Racisme in Catalonia stress the importance of talking about “hackneyed subjects” or “stereotypes” instead of rumors in order to deconstruct as well the construction of prejudice.

Regulation and auto-regulation of discourse

To be effective, anti-discrimination and anti-racist campaigns have to be backed up by political elites. However, several political leaders and political parties have had a major role in validating stereotypes and falsenesses about migration, especially in political campaign’s discourses.

As proposed by the National agreement on immigration, a formal commitment of political parties should be made to reject instrumental use of migration and form a “cordon sanitaire” around political organizations and leaders who spread racism, falseness and intolerance.

This compromise should involve also the local structures of parties. Political parties should use the means at their disposal to regulate and implement effectively this commitment. The ambivalence of political parties which officially disagree with anti-immigrant statements and intolerance but have a laissez-faire approach of controversies, is in part responsible of the multiplications of statements which test the red lines between what can and cannot be said.

Legal means to fight racism and hate speech

The jurisprudence of Catalan courts still gives priority to the freedom of speech in political life over the sanction of discrimination by speech and prejudices expressed toward migrants. Only few cases of anti-immigrant discourses have led to a condemnation of the speaker. The Law and courts' sentences remain lax on discrimination. This restricts the possibilities for the civil society and public institutions to oppose actively discourses which are considered racists or discriminatory.

- Support anti-racist organizations and create structures to which victims of discrimination can file complaint for free.
- Reduce the length of trials: their duration makes it difficult to combat actively racism.
- Create awareness campaigns about discrimination and racism directed at judges and law schools.

Participation and representation of migrants

As a recent country of immigration, Spain does not count with an important participation and representation of migrants' representatives in political life. Stakeholders agree in their majority on the fact that political rights of foreigners would be changing the regulation of political discourses. Giving the application of rules of reciprocity for local elections, some foreigners - almost exclusively Latin-Americans - have the right to vote. In 2014, Moroccans will in theory also be allowed to participate to local elections. The political empowerment of migrants will contribute to change the discourse on migration. Still, Spain has also to ensure the effective participation and representation of migrants and minority citizens in order to normalize social and cultural diversity in the society.

Advanced social policies in times of crisis

It is impossible to separate the rise of intolerance in political discourses and the deep financial, economic and social crisis that Spain is experiencing. Immigrants' work and social conditions have got worse since the crisis and migrants have been more affected than nationals by unemployment. In addition, the Spanish government announced in April 2012 its intention to exclude unauthorized migrants from medical coverage. On the other hand, restrictions in social policies and the general cuts in welfare, health, housing and education have led to a growing unrest among nationals and to a growing sentiment of competition with migrants. One of the main components of anti-immigrant and intolerant discourses is based on welfare chauvinism and socio-national protectionism.

In the case of Spain and Catalonia it appears clearly that the preservation of cultural homogeneity is overcome by the preservation of social cohesion and living standards. These interconnections between crisis, restrictive social policies and anti-immigrant sentiments, discourses and attitudes have to be considered as an alarm and a priority for policy-making.

This concretely means that:

- Policies trying to deal with the economic crisis should be aware of the necessity to preserve the situation of the lower middle class who is the more affected by the crisis and the more likely to develop anti-immigrant sentiments if put in a direct situation of competition with migrants.
- Public messages (in the media and politics) should avoid at all costs to present migrants and locals as competitors on the job market and for social resources. Instead, public campaigns should keep on fighting prejudices and spreading the message that migrants are not the source of the crisis.

Methodology

The research draws on a qualitative methodology to study political discourses and policies which express intolerance toward migration and cultural diversity. The methodology chosen combines a content analysis of secondary sources and semi-structured qualitative interviews.

The desk research has been conducted between September and November 2011 and consisted mainly in collecting secondary sources. Newspapers materials have been collected on the three cases studied for the period between January 2010 and June 2011 (end of local elections) in seven Spanish (3) and Catalan (4) newspapers. Relevant articles which contained or referred to political discourses on the topic of the controversy have been selected as a sample of discourses. This sample is of 48 articles for the case of the anti-Romanian Roma campaign, 63 articles for the case on full-veil prohibition and 68 articles for the case on undocumented immigrants' exclusion from municipal census. In addition, a sample of articles on the municipal campaign of 2011 has been collected and analyzed, especially when articles referred to migration issues in the campaign and to the radical-right political party, PxC.

The second part of the desk research consisted in the collection and analysis of administrative, policy and civil society documents: minutes of city councils in Lleida, Badalona and Vic, and of the Catalan parliament along with public positions of civil society organizations and public reports.

Between November and December 2011, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant actors who had taken part in one or more of the three controversies and leaders of the main political parties. All interviews have been tape recorded and transcribed.

- The following political party leaders on immigration issues have been interviewed: Initiative for Catalonia – Greens (IC-V), Republican left of Catalonia (ERC), Socialist party of Catalonia (PSC), Convergence and Union (CiU) and Popular party of Catalonia (PPC). They are the main political groups represented at the Catalan parliament.

- A sample of 10 relevant actors in public administration and social organizations who took part in one or more of the controversies has been selected to carry out interviews. This selection was based on secondary sources analysis which highlighted the main participants to the debates and “snowball” technique.

Project Identity

Acronym:	ACCEPT PLURALISM
Title:	Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe
Short Description:	<p>ACCEPT PLURALISM questions how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within liberal and secular democracies in Europe. The notions of tolerance, acceptance, respect and recognition are central to the project. ACCEPT PLURALISM looks at both native and immigrant minority groups.</p> <p>Through comparative, theoretical and empirical analysis the project studies individuals, groups or practices for whom tolerance is sought but which we should not tolerate; of which we disapprove but which should be tolerated; and for which we ask to go beyond toleration and achieve respect and recognition.</p> <p>In particular, we investigate when, what and who is being not tolerated / tolerated / respected in 15 European countries; why this is happening in each case; the reasons that different social actors put forward for not tolerating / tolerating / respecting specific minority groups/individuals and specific practices.</p> <p>The project analyses practices, policies and institutions, and produces key messages for policy makers with a view to making European societies more respectful towards diversity.</p>
Website:	www.accept-pluralism.eu
Duration:	March 2010-May 2013 (39 months)
Funding Scheme:	Small and medium-scale collaborative project
EU contribution:	2,600,230 Euro
Consortium:	17 partners (15 countries)
Coordinator:	European University Institute (Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies)
Person Responsible:	Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou
EC officer:	Ms Louisa Anastopoulou, Project Officer