



## GIB LOW PRIORITY BUT FACES TOUGH PUBLIC OPINION IN SPAIN – SURVEY

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The dispute over Gibraltar figures low on the list of priorities for the average Spaniard, despite widespread media coverage and the fact that it taps into common feelings of national pride and identity, according to a survey conducted by the leading Spanish think tank Real Instituto Elcano.

The survey found that Spaniards regarded the economic crisis, political corruption, Spanish-German bilateral relations and Spain's influence in the EU as more important issues than the Gibraltar dispute.

Despite this, the study also found that almost two out of every three Spanish respondents supported the measures currently being applied by the Spanish Government to pile pressure on Gibraltar, while only 37% considered them inappropriate.

Spanish respondents were generally "cautious and prudent" about further pressure from Spain on Gibraltar, fearful of damaging areas of business such as British tourism.

Even so, an alarming 45% of them said they would favour closing the frontier or closing Spanish airspace to flights to or from Gibraltar.

Likewise around 93% of Spanish respondents believed that the dumping of concrete blocks into the sea was a serious matter, with a similar percentage expressing the same view over allegations that Gibraltar tolerates smuggling and money laundering.

### IN DEPTH

The survey was published yesterday and is the first in-depth assessment of public opinion in both Spain and the UK conducted since the row over Gibraltar flared up over a month ago.

The Instituto Elcano polled 1,010 respondents in Spain and another 1,001 in the UK, all aged 18 and above and stratified by self-weighted geographical areas and quotas proportional to the country's population, according to age and gender.



The survey was conducted over a five-day period toward the end of August and each interviewee was asked to complete an online questionnaire in their own language.

The findings offer important insight into public attitudes in both countries on a range of issues relating to Gibraltar.

“In Spain there is a strong consensus regarding the country’s claim to Gibraltar,” said Javier Noya, senior analyst on Spain’s international image and public opinion at the Madrid-based think tank.

“Furthermore, our poll suggests that this widely-held view is largely independent of respondents’ social status or education.”

“Whatever their background, a majority of Spaniards are of the view that Gibraltar belongs to Spain.”

The survey nonetheless revealed major differences in opinion once identities and ideologies were factored in. While only one out of two Spanish respondents who placed themselves on the far left of the political spectrum claimed that Gibraltar was Spanish, among those on the far right more than 80% held this view.

In short, those on the right generally support Spain’s claim to sovereignty over Gibraltar with far greater determination than those on the left.

Nevertheless, it was feelings of national pride that provided the most convincing explanation of Spanish attitudes towards the Gibraltar issue. Virtually all (86%) of those who said they were very proud to be Spanish supported Spain’s claim to the Rock, almost three times as many as those who did not share that feeling of national pride (33%).

“It goes without saying that there is a strong correlation between ideology and feelings of national pride,” Sr Noya said.

“However, these results suggest that Spaniards’ current attitudes towards the Gibraltar issue depend more on their feelings of national pride and identity than on ideological preferences alone.”

Around 60% of British respondents said Gibraltar was important for their country’s national interests in the wider world, compared to 52% in Spain.

“This could be due to Spaniards being more concerned about problems other than Gibraltar,” Sr Noya added



## SOVEREIGNTY

The survey found that 76% of British respondents said they backed the British Government's support for Gibraltar.

Asked about their preferred sovereignty status for Gibraltar, 48% of British respondents said the current British status, while the same percentage of interviewees in Spain said they would prefer Gibraltar to be Spanish.

There was also greater backing for joint sovereignty in Spain than the UK – 28% versus 17% - while a quarter of UK respondents backed Gibraltar's right to self determination compared to 17% of those questioned in Spain.

British participants in the survey were asked whether the UK or the Gibraltarians should have the final say on Gibraltar.

"An overwhelming majority (75%) were in favour of the Gibraltarians being able to determine their future," Sr Noya said.

Asked if they considered Gibraltar British or Spanish, the results were largely predictable. Some 79% in the UK said Gibraltar was British, while 70% in Spain said it was Spanish.

Spaniards expressed strong support for the UK to engage in bilateral talks with Spain toward decolonisation.

Asked if Britain and Spain should agree on shared sovereignty, 60% in the UK said no while 62% in Spain said yes.

But both sets of interviewees agreed in overwhelming terms that it was unlikely that such an agreement would ever be possible.

## HONG KONG

Well over half of the respondents in the UK said there were not many similarities between Hong Kong and Gibraltar, though nearly two thirds drew parallels with the Falklands.

British respondents were asked whether they would be very concerned if Gibraltar was to become a Spanish territory, in the same way that the sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred to China in 1997.

Only 22% said they would be "not at all" concerned, though the majority (44%) said they would only be "somewhat" concerned. The balance said they would be "quite" or "very" concerned.



“Although the British defend their country’s sovereignty over the Rock, their attitude is relatively lukewarm, at least as regards part of the UK’s electorate,” Sr Noye said.

“Two out of every three Britons seemed willing to give up British sovereignty over Gibraltar, answering that they would only be somewhat or not at all concerned, showing themselves to be far less assertive than in the previous questions.”

“It is evident that the more favourable reaction to Spanish sovereignty is the result of reminding respondents of the precedent of handing over Hong Kong to China, thereby qualifying their answers.”

“Under these conditions, the prospect of decolonisation does not appear to be so traumatic.”

Drilling deeper into the results, the survey found that the older the respondent, the greater the concern over the possibility of a handover.

Another interesting aspect of the British results stemmed from education and political ideology, with university-educated respondents and those on the left more likely to entertain a transfer of sovereignty.

“Paradoxically, the Spanish government’s best ally might turn out to be the British anticolonial left,” Sr Noye said.

Irrespective of the dispute, most respondents in both Spain and Britain believed the UK and Spain enjoyed good relations.

by Brian Reyes