

Gibraltar and public opinion in the UK and Spain

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(1) Introduction

In view of the current tension between the UK and Spain as a result of the dispute over Gibraltar, the Elcano Royal Institute has carried out a survey amongst a representative sample of the populations of the two countries. The aim is to gain a better understanding of their reaction to the conflict that has broken out in the summer of 2013 and their opinions on underlying issues such as sovereignty over the Rock and the importance of bilateral relations.

This report summarises the study's main results.

(2) Technical data

- Universe: general population over 18 years of age in Spain and the UK.
- Sample size: Spanish sample 1,010 interviews; UK sample, 1,001 interviews.
- Interviews: online questionnaires completed by the interviewees.
- Languages: a Spanish questionnaire was used in Spain and an English one in the UK.
- Sample: stratified by self-weighted geographical areas and quotas proportional to the country's population, according to age and gender.
- Sample error: $\pm 3.2\%$ for each sample (1,000 n) for $p = q = 0.5$, with a confidence interval of 95.5 in the case of simple random sampling.
- Survey period: from 21 to 26 August 2013.
- Fieldwork coordination: GAD3.

(3) Mutual perceptions and views of Gibraltar

(3.1) Reciprocity of mutual perceptions and the rating of bilateral relations

On a scale from 0 to 10, Britons rate Spain with a score of 6.2, which is identical to the score Spaniards give the UK. Therefore, despite the conflict over Gibraltar, the perception the British have of Spain and the Spanish of the UK is good and, furthermore, reciprocal.

There is, however, a significant difference. The British rate themselves with a score of 7.5, while the Spanish have a poorer view of themselves, with a score of 6. As a result, it could be said that Britons have a higher level of self esteem or national sentiment than Spaniards.

		Country that rates	
		UK	Spain
Country rated	Spain	6.2	6.0
	UK	7.5	6.2

As regards the state of bilateral relations, a large majority in both countries consider them to be good, despite the Gibraltar dispute. Since the UK is the 'winner', as it is in possession of sovereignty, and Spain the 'loser', the percentage of positive ratings is slightly lower in Spain, at 74% vs 80%.

Regardless of the dispute over Gibraltar, how do you rate the relations between Spain and the UK?

(%)	UK	Spain
Very good	7.8	3.9
Good	72.4	67.8
Bad	17.9	25.0
Very bad	1.9	3.4
	100.0	100.0

The same is true of the importance attributed to the bilateral relationship. Although public opinion in both countries believes it to be important, the British consider it to be more so than the Spanish.

Regardless of the dispute over Gibraltar, how would you rate the importance of the relations between Spain and the UK for your own country's interests?

(%)	UK	Spain
Very important	7.1	3.7
Quite important	72.6	60.0
Not very important	18.3	31.9
Not important	2.0	4.5
	100.0	100.0

(3.2) Importance of Gibraltar for the interests of each country

Public opinion in both the UK and Spain again coincide in stressing the importance of the Rock to their country's interests, although the British consider Gibraltar somewhat more important than the Spanish (60% to 52%).

Do you think Gibraltar is important for your country's interests in the world?

(%)	UK	Spain
Very important	14.4	11.5
Quite important	45.4	40.4
Not very important	34.1	37.0
Not important	6.2	11.1
	100.0	100.0

This could be due to Spaniards being more concerned about problems other than Gibraltar. In a question posed for Spaniards only, respondents were asked to rate a number of issues from 0 to 10. The Gibraltar dispute was rated at 5.7, more than three points below the economic crisis and political corruption and even below Spanish-German bilateral relations and Spain's influence in the EU, which both score 7.

Indeed Spaniards only consider one issue less important than Gibraltar: the dispute with Morocco over Ceuta and Melilla. On a scale from 0 to 10, Ceuta and Melilla score half a point less than the dispute over Gibraltar.

On a scale from 0 to 10, how important are the following issues for you?

The economic crisis	9.1
Corruption	9.1
Spain's influence in the EU	7.1
Spain's relations with Germany	6.7
The dispute with the UK over Gibraltar	5.7
The dispute with Morocco over Ceuta and Melilla	5.1

Base: Spanish sample.

(4) The current spat over the Rock: rejection of the steps taken by the Gibraltarian government and support for the Spanish government

(4.1) Structural and current problems

Spanish respondents were asked how serious they considered certain events or activities in Gibraltar, either on a regular basis or more recently. Following recent news reports, Spaniards are greatly annoyed by the dumping of concrete blocks in the sea to hinder the work of Spanish fishermen and, to the same degree, by the Gibraltarian authorities' toleration of smuggling and money laundering. Practically all Spaniards disapprove of these activities, at rates of over 90% in both cases. To a lesser extent, Spaniards are also unhappy about British ships anchoring in Gibraltar and about the British military base there, with around 60% of respondents considering them a serious problem. Finally, slightly less than half of the Spanish respondents have a negative opinion of visits by British authorities.

How do you rate the following situations and measures taken by the Gibraltarian government?

(%)	Very serious	Quite serious	Not very serious	Not at all serious	Total
Dumping concrete blocks in the sea to hinder the activities of Spanish fishermen	77.0	16.3	5.6	1.0	100
Toleration of smuggling and money laundering	68.0	24.4	6.5	1.1	100
Anchoring of British ships	31.4	35.2	26.5	6.8	100
Existence of a British military base	25.0	34.4	31.7	9.0	100
Visits by British authorities	14.9	31.4	38.1	15.6	100

Base: Spanish sample.

(4.2) Recent action taken by the British and Spanish governments

As regards the recent action taken by the two governments in the dispute, **three-quarters of British respondents support David Cameron, who is criticised by more than 80% of Spaniards.**

How do you rate the British government's reaction regarding Gibraltar in the past few weeks?

(%)	UK	Spain
Very good	19.1	4.2
Good	57.4	14.5
Bad	19.9	36.8
Very bad	3.6	44.6
	100.0	100.0

However, here again there are significant differences in opinion. **When Spaniards are asked about the 'pressure currently applied by the Spanish government', almost two out of every three respondents (62%) are in support,** while 37% consider it inappropriate. But support in the UK for the British government is significantly higher: three out of every four (76%) have a positive opinion of the British government's response.

How do you rate the Spanish government's current pressure on Gibraltar?

	%
Very good	18.0
Good	44.8
Bad	26.4
Very bad	10.8
	100.0

Base: Spanish sample.

As to possible measures to be taken against Gibraltar or the UK, **Spaniards are generally cautious and prudent.** Sixty percent reject making it difficult for British nationals to live in Spain, suggesting that Spaniards are aware of the importance of British tourism for the Spanish economy. In a less determined way, they are also against boycotting British products, with 53% against and 46% in favour.

Although not supported by the majority, many Spaniards would favour closing the frontier or closing Spanish airspace to flights to or from Gibraltar (45%).

Would you support the following measures by the Spanish Government?

(%)	Very much	Quite a lot	Not much	Not at all	
Close the frontier	24.6	21.6	29.2	24.7	100
Close Spain's airspace to flights to and from Gibraltar	28.5	19.6	26.2	25.6	100
Boycott British products	25.3	21.5	27.0	26.1	100
Increase the difficulties for British citizens to reside in Spain	22.8	18.9	27.7	30.6	100

(5) Sovereignty: British acceptance of a Spanish Gibraltar?

(5.1) The preferred status for Gibraltar

Respondents in both countries were asked to choose their preferred status for the Rock from among the following options:

- Its current status (British sovereignty).
- Spanish sovereignty.
- Joint sovereignty.
- Gibraltarian independence and self-determination.

Less than half the British respondents (48%) defend UK sovereignty, while almost 10% consider Spanish sovereignty their preferred status for Gibraltar and another 17% would accept joint sovereignty. Interestingly, exactly the same percentage of Spaniards want a Spanish Gibraltar (48%). What is striking is that the percentages are identical, with such symmetry being absent in other aspects.

As for the other options, Spaniards naturally seem to believe that 'something is better than nothing' and are better disposed than the British towards joint sovereignty, with 28% in favour versus only 17% in the UK.

As could be expected, the British are more in favour of self-determination for the Gibraltarians than the Spanish: 25% vs 17%. The underlying reason for such a preference seems perfectly rational: 'better independent than in foreign hands'.

What is your preferred status for Gibraltar?

(%)	UK	Spain
Current status (British sovereignty)	48.4	7.0
Spanish sovereignty	9.3	48.3
Joint UK-Spanish sovereignty	16.7	27.6
Gibraltarian self-determination	25.7	17.0
	100.0	100.0

British respondents were asked whether the British government or the Gibraltarians themselves should have the final say on Gibraltar. An overwhelming majority (75%) were in favour of the Gibraltarians being able to determine their future.

Who should have the final say on Gibraltar?

	%
The UK	24.6
The Gibraltarians	75.4
	100.0

Base: British sample.

Of course, the answer is not innocent, because the British know they would be the winners, since 85% are correct in affirming that the Gibraltarians would want to retain their British citizenship.

As far as you know, what do the Gibraltarians want?

	%
Continue to be British	85.2
Become Spanish	14.8
	100.0

Base: British sample.

(5.2) Similarities and differences with the Falkland Islands and Hong Kong

A positive note for Spain's claim is the significant percentage of Britons who see a certain similarity between Gibraltar and other British colonies or former colonies. Forty-five per cent believe there is a similarity with Hong Kong before its transfer to China. Spaniards hold the same belief.

Do you think there are similarities between Gibraltar and Hong Kong prior to its transfer to China?

	UK	Spain
Vey much	8.7	9.8
Quite a lot	34.6	38.8
Not much	39.6	39.1
Not at all	17.2	12.3
	100.0	100.0

Opinions are also close in both countries when it is the Falkland Islands that are compared with Gibraltar, although it is the British who see a greater similarity: 67% vs 53%. Evidently, the fact that both territories are currently under British sovereignty means that the similarity is more obvious in the UK.

Do you think that as regards sovereignty, Gibraltar is similar to the Falkland Islands?

(%)	UK	Spain
Very much	19.4	9.3
Quite a lot	46.3	44.6
Not much	24.6	32.4
Not at all	9.8	13.8
	100.0	100.0

(5.3). The resolution of the dispute: rejection of the use of force and preference for bilateral or multilateral negotiations

As regards possible strategies for Spain to regain sovereignty over Gibraltar, military action is ruled out, with a score of only 3 on a scale from 0 to 10 (although this is still quite a high score for such a farfetched notion).

On the contrary, Spaniards tend to favour other options, such as raising the pressure on Gibraltar (6.6), or requesting EU mediation and seeking arbitration from an international court of law (both scoring 7). But Spaniards particularly favour compliance with UN resolutions that call for the UK to decolonise the territory and to engage in bilateral talks (8).

On a scale of 0 to 10, what score would you give to each of the following strategies that Spain might follow to regain sovereignty over Gibraltar?

Demand compliance with UN resolutions	8.0
Negotiate with the UK	7.8
Seek arbitration from an international court	7.5
Request EU mediation	7.4
Three-way negotiations	6.8
Increase the pressure on Gibraltar	6.6
Military invasion and occupation	2.9

Base: Spanish sample.

Comparing public opinion in the two countries, Spaniards support negotiations with the UK with the same intensity that the British reject them, at around 60%.

Do you think the British government should negotiate with Spain to agree on shared sovereignty?

(%)	UK	Spain
Yes	40.6	61.6
No	59.4	38.4
	100.0	100.0

However, they coincide on the unlikelihood of the two governments ever being able to reach an agreement on the decolonisation of Gibraltar. In both countries, 57% of those polled do not consider a negotiated settlement possible.

The UN has called on the UK to negotiate the decolonisation of Gibraltar with Spain: do you believe the two governments will be able to reach an agreement?

(%)	UK	Spain
Yes	42.2	42.6
No	57.8	57.4
	100.0	100.0

(5.4) Gibraltar is Spanish according to the British?

In both Spain and the UK, a clear majority stress their respective claims to sovereignty over the Rock. As its status is currently that of a British territory, it is not surprising that the percentage is higher in the UK, with 80% of respondents claiming Gibraltar is British.

Nevertheless, it is striking that such a large percentage of Spaniards claim it is Spanish, with up to 70% being of that opinion.

Do you consider Gibraltar British or Spanish?

(%)	UK	Spain
British	78.5	29.6
Spanish	21.5	70.4
	100.0	100.0

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. Perhaps the survey's most interesting finding in the UK is that in response to the question 'In 1997, the UK transferred the sovereignty of Hong Kong to China – Would you be very concerned if Gibraltar were to become Spanish territory?', **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.

In 1997, the UK transferred the sovereignty of Hong Kong to China – Would you be very concerned if Gibraltar were to become Spanish territory?

	%
Very	13.2
Quite	21.2
Somewhat	44.0
Not at all	21.7
	100.0

Base: British sample.

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.

Looking further into these results, a significant generation gap can be identified. Seventy-five per cent of Britons under 24 are only somewhat or not at all concerned at the idea of Spain recovering Gibraltar, while the figure remains at a still high 66% among those aged between 25 and 34. Predictably perhaps, the percentage drops to 51% among the over-65s.

		In 1997, the UK transferred the sovereignty of Hong Kong to China – Would you be very concerned if Gibraltar were to become Spanish territory?				
(%)		Very	Quite	Somewhat	Not at all	Total
Age	18-24	9.2	24.8	45.9	20.2	100.0
	25-34	7.6	25.7	39.2	27.5	100.0
	35-44	6.1	21.1	41.7	31.1	100.0
	45-54	11.7	12.8	51.7	23.9	100.0
	55-64	13.1	22.9	51.0	13.1	100.0
	65+	27.4	21.6	37.0	13.9	100.0
Total		13,2	21.2	44.0	21.7	100.0

Base: British sample.

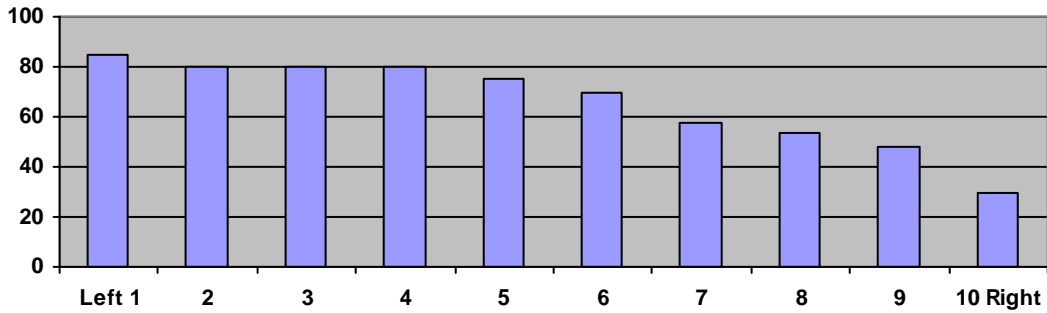
In line with these results, support for British sovereignty is greater, at 70%, among those with lower educational qualifications, while it is supported by only 32% of those with a University education.

		In 1997, the UK transferred the sovereignty of Hong Kong to China – Would you be very concerned if Gibraltar were to become Spanish territory?				
		Very	Quite	Somewhat	Not at all	Total
Education	Primary	38.5	30.8	7.7	23.1	100.0
	Secondary	14.3	21.3	44.5	19.9	100.0
	Higher	11.0	20.7	44.4	23.9	100.0
Total		13,2	21.2	44.0	21.7	100.0

Base: British sample.

Finally, the effect of political ideas should be stressed as well. Unsurprisingly, the willingness to transfer sovereignty over Gibraltar to Spain is greater on the left and steadily declines as we move to the right of the political spectrum: from 80% on the far left to 30% on the far right. Therefore, this is undoubtedly the most important variable. Paradoxically, the Spanish government's best ally might turn out to be the British anticolonial left.

Political views of British interviewees and support for Spanish sovereignty over Gibraltar



Base: British sample.

5.5. Spanish attitudes to Gibraltar: a matter of identity

In Spain there is a strong consensus regarding the country’s claim to Gibraltar. 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 poll also reveals that opinions vary somewhat between different age groups, though not very significantly: 60% of those under 24 claim that Gibraltar is Spanish, while among all those over the age of 55 this proportion exceeds 70%.

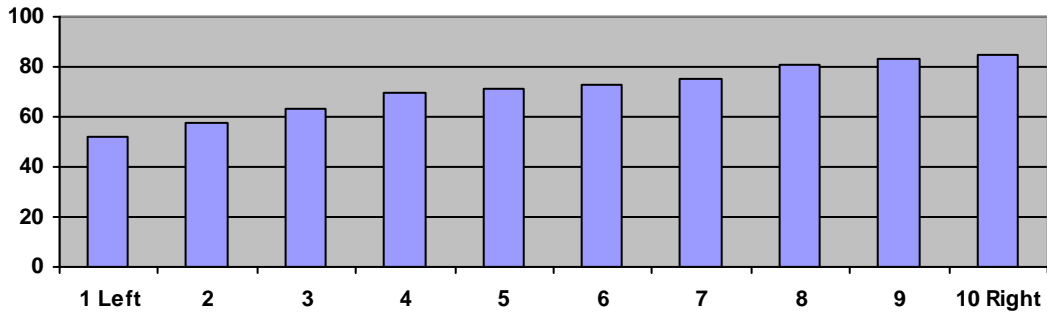
	In your view, is Gibraltar British or Spanish?		Total	
	British	Spanish		
Age	18-24	38.8%	61.2%	100%
	25-34	32.6%	67.4%	100%
	35-44	27.4%	72.6%	100%
	45-54	25.9%	74.1%	100%
	55-64	28.3%	71.7%	100%
	65+	25.7%	74.3%	100%
	Total	29.6%	70.4%	100%

Base: Spanish sample.

However, our survey does reveal major differences when we move into the realm of identities and ideologies. Thus, while only one out of two Spanish respondents who place themselves on the far left of the political spectrum claim that Gibraltar is Spanish, among those on the far right more than 80% hold this view. This difference of some

30 percentage points is highly significant in statistical terms, and very eloquent in political terms. In short, **those on the right generally support Spain's claim to sovereignty over Gibraltar with far greater determination than those on the left.**

Ideological preferences of Spanish respondents and support for Spanish sovereignty over Gibraltar



Base: Spanish sample

Nevertheless, it is above all respondents' feelings of national pride that provide the most convincing explanation of their attitudes towards the Gibraltar issue. Virtually all (86%) of those who say they are very proud to be Spanish support Spain's claim to the Rock, **almost three times** as many as those who do not share this feeling of pride (33%).

		In your view, is Gibraltar British or Spanish?		Total
		British	Spanish	
Are you proud to be Spanish?	Very proud	14.1%	85.9%	100%
	Quite proud	29.2%	70.8%	100%
	Not very proud	41.7%	58.3%	100%
	Not at all proud	66.7%	33.3%	100%
Total		29.6%	70.4%	100%

Base: Spanish sample.

It goes without saying that there is a strong correlation between ideology and feelings of national pride. 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.**