

In Catalonia, Spain, bullfighting is legal again after 4-year ban is lifted

By Agence France-Presse, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.07.16

Word Count **684**



A bull runs past horsemen during the "Toro de la Pena" festival, formerly known as "Toro de la Vega," in the town of Tordesillas in Spain, September 13, 2016. AFP/Cesar Manso/Getty Images

Spain's Constitutional Court on Thursday cancelled a bullfighting ban in Catalonia. The decision is likely to worsen tensions between Spain's capital, Madrid, and the separatist region, and also drew an outcry from animal activists.

The decision represents a significant victory for supporters of the centuries-old bullfighting tradition, who have long sparred with animal rights organizations that believe bullfighting is a cruel, outdated event.

In a statement, the court argued bullfighting was classified as part of Spain's traditions. Therefore, a decision on banning it was a matter for the central government, not Catalonia, which is a semi-autonomous region.

The ban has been declared "unconstitutional and void," it said.

Catalonia First Abolished Bullfighting In 2012

Catalonia's regional parliament voted to abolish bullfighting from January 1, 2012, after animal rights groups got 180,000 signatures for a petition.

It was the first region in mainland Spain to ban the tradition, although the Canary Islands abolished bullfighting in 1991.

Catalonia is a region of Spain with its own language, a fierce sense of identity and a desire to seek independence from Spain. When the bullfighting ban was first introduced in Catalonia, critics argued that more than an animal rights issue, the ban was politically motivated.

The court decision is likely to increase already-high tensions between Madrid and Catalonia, which is making moves to separate from Spain and has announced a vote on the issue next year.

Politicians Speak Out

It drew immediate reactions from politicians on both sides of the divide.

"In the Spanish state, it's unconstitutional to ban the public torture and murder of an animal. Enough said," tweeted Gabriel Rufian, a Catalan separatist lawmaker in national parliament.

Meanwhile Alicia Sanchez-Camacho, a leader in the conservative Popular Party that took the ban to court, said she "welcomed" the decision.

She tweeted that the party would "continue to defend" freedom and bullfighting.

Even Spain's animal rights party PACMA criticized the decision as politically motivated.

"Once more they have been found to use animals in a political war," said party member Ana Bayle.

"They don't know anything about animals, nor do they care."

Bullfighting Has Become More Controversial Recently

The debate does not only touch on Spain's fraught issue of regionality.

Bullfighting has drawn increasing controversy and protests around Spain in recent years.

No other region has banned bullfighting since Catalonia made the move, though Castile and Leon in Spain's northwest abolished the killing of bulls at town festivals in June.

The move targeted the region's controversial Toro de la Vega festival, where horsemen chase a bull and spear it in front of onlookers.

Several cities have also put a stop to corridas (bullfights) or annual festivals with bull running over the years.

Supporters See It As A Form Of Art

But supporters of bullfighting, known as "aficionados," are not giving up without a struggle.

They see bullfighting as an art that is an integral part of Spanish culture, like flamenco, a Spanish art form that includes singing, dancing and guitar playing.

Spain's first pro-bullfight lobbying group, the Bull Foundation, made up of breeders, matadors and "aficionados," also argues that bullfighting is beneficial for the economy, maintaining around 200,000 jobs directly or indirectly.

Simon Casas, a former matador whose company now manages bullfighting rings in Madrid and other cities, welcomed the court decision.

"Bullfighting is a form of culture under supervision of Spain's culture ministry; it's an art form that is part of the identity of some people," he said. "It was totally absurd that a political institution – the Catalan government – was able to ban it."

"The debate wasn't about liking or not liking bullfighting, being for or against it, it was a constitutional issue and the court sorted it out," he added.

Traditions That Are Not Animal-Friendly

Other controversial traditions involving animals, such as throwing a live goat off a tall church steeple to a crowd below, have also been banned over the years.

Others, however, continue to take place. For example, people still place flammable balls of tar on the horns of bulls. Then they set the tar on fire and let the animals loose in the street.

Quiz

- 1 Read the paragraph from the section "Catalonia First Abolished Bullfighting In 2012."

Catalonia's regional parliament voted to abolish bullfighting from January 1, 2012, after animal rights groups got 180,000 signatures for a petition.

Which conclusion is BEST supported by the paragraph?

- (A) Animal rights groups in Catalonia are in control of their region's government.
 - (B) Almost all of Catalonia's population supports a ban on bullfighting.
 - (C) Catalonia's government was initially reluctant to ban bullfighting.
 - (D) Animal rights groups in Catalonia used the political process to achieve a change they wanted.
- 2 Select the paragraph from the section "Bullfighting Has Become More Controversial Recently" that supports the idea that the bullfighting issue in Spain is not likely to go away any time soon.
- 3 Which of these quotes from the article BEST reflects the viewpoint of Spain's Constitutional Court about the bullfighting ban in Catalonia?
- (A) "In the Spanish state, it's unconstitutional to ban the public torture and murder of an animal. Enough said," tweeted Gabriel Rufian, a Catalan separatist lawmaker in national parliament.
 - (B) "Once more they have been found to use animals in a political war," said party member Ana Bayle.
 - (C) "Bullfighting is a form of culture under supervision of Spain's culture ministry; it's an art form that is part of the identity of some people," he said.
 - (D) "The debate wasn't about liking or not liking bullfighting, being for or against it, it was a constitutional issue and the court sorted it out," he added.

- 4 Which answer choice BEST describes the author's point of view in the article?
- (A) The decision by Spain's central court to overturn Catalonia's ban on bullfighting will cause Catalonia to separate from Spain.
 - (B) Catalonia's government wants to ban bullfighting, but many people outside the region, including Spain's central court, oppose a ban.
 - (C) The issue of bullfighting in Spain is largely a political one that should not be decided by Spain's central court.
 - (D) The issue of bullfighting in Spain is largely an emotional one because bullfighting is a source of jobs for many people in Spain.