

MODULE 5.

# PEACE STRATEGIES IN CATALONIA

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# Learning goals

Can we say that there is peace in Catalonia? If we understand peace as an always perfectible horizon, what would be the main challenges in order to have a more pacific situation in Catalonia? This material aims to reflect on what these main challenges for peace are in today's Catalonia, clarify some related concepts, and provide peace strategies that we as citizens can undertake.



## KNOWLEDGE

- Understand some of the similarities and differences between conflict and polarization.
- Learn the implications of dialogue.



## ABILITIES

- Opt for critical thinking and controversy.
- Listen to the Other.



## ATTITUDES

- Take measures to mitigate one's own biases in a dialogue.
- Empathize with the Other.
- Know how to define one's own limits of nonviolence, and argue what actions one considers to be violent or nonviolent.

# Peace Strategies in Catalonia: What are we talking about?

Peace is a changing concept which can vary from one context to another, and which evolves as societies move forward to progress. As previously stated in Module 1 about Culture of Peace, in each context and in each moment it may be appropriate to define some priorities or other objectives.

Catalonia is an autonomous community in Spain. Socially and politically, some citizens have claimed their right to self-determination, the possibility to hold a referendum and to vote on it. However, the will of the Catalan citizens is diverse and there are complex emotional and practical reasons behind each position. Some people would like to see an independent Catalonia and some would not.

But if we look at the whole picture, what are the present priorities for peace work in Catalonia? The Catalan independence movement, the rise of the Spanish right wing, political fragmentation, the increasing success of the feminist movement, and xenophobic speeches, among other factors, raise the challenge of social polarization and living together. Besides, the proliferation of false rumors and fake news, which promote hate speech, forces us to develop a critical discourse, dare to counter those arguments, and be bold to deal with controversial topics.

According to figure 5.1, the main matters of common concern of the Catalan public opinion are Catalonia-Spain relations (which concerns 43% of the surveyed population), dissatisfaction with politics (36.9%), unemployment and job insecurity (25.3%), and to a lesser extent the functioning of the economy (14.1%) and the health system (11.8%). Other issues that are present in public debate such as immigration, access to housing, citizens' insecurity, and the lack of freedoms are of less concern to the surveyed population (7.2%, 7.1%, 6.9%, and 3.7% respectively).

In accordance with these matters of concern, in this module we will deal with the Catalonia-Spain conflict and its challenges by focusing on some key concepts like polarization, dialogue, and nonviolence.

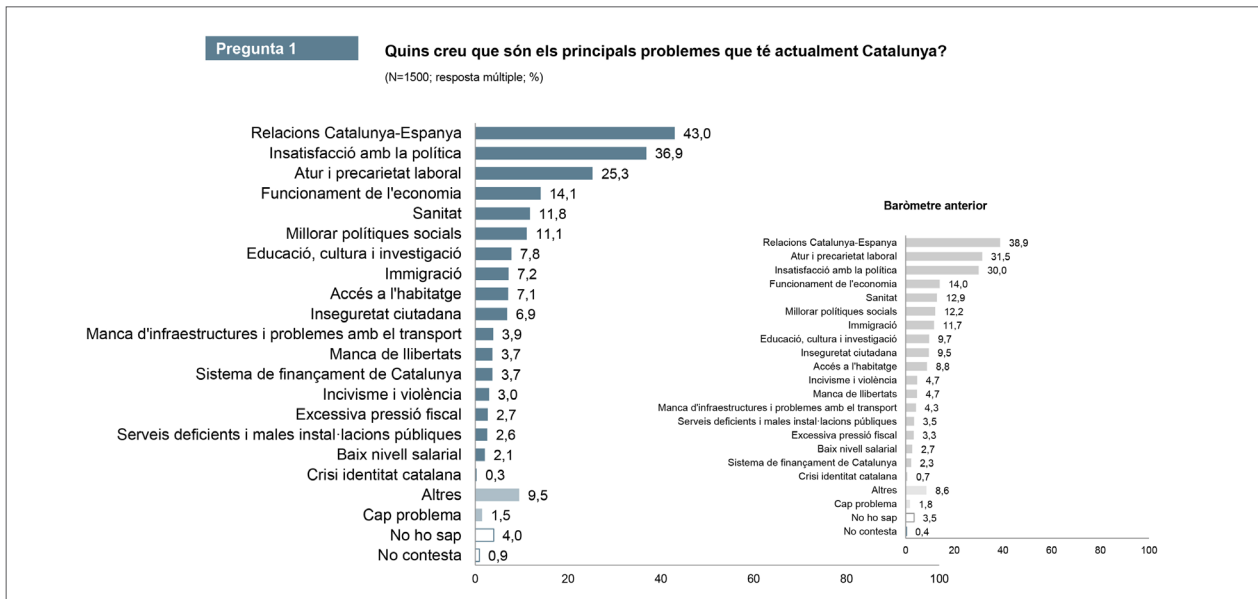


Figure 5.1. Main matters of common concern of the Catalan public opinion (2019). Source: Political Opinion Barometer (Catalonia). December 2019. p. 9.

## CONFLICT AND POLARIZATION IN CATALONIA

More and more opinions warn that the conflict in Catalonia has come to stay. Many voices have demanded and continue to demand a political dialogue with the Spanish government, but as citizens we also have actions within our reach to assume our share of responsibility.

Currently, the Catalan conflict is far from being considered a violent conflict. The majority of the research centers consider it a low-intensity sociopolitical conflict. For example, the International Crisis Group, a center of international reference for its monthly follow-up of tensions and conflicts all over the world, considers the Catalonia-Spain situation as a low grade conflict – even when including the events that took place in October 2019 when a several-year sentence on the imprisoned Catalan pro-independence political leaders was pronounced, provoking demonstrations in the streets to protest against it.

The theory of conflict states that, when there is a side with less negotiation power than the other, this side has to exert pressure so that its demands are recognized as legitimate. These pressure actions can include plenty of acts, from less to more pacific (demonstrations in the streets, symbolic actions, strikes, or even boycott, sabotage, etc.) (Sharp, 1973). At the same time, any action of pressure, be it performed by defenders or detractors of the Catalan independence movement, carries in itself a risk of social and political polarization, even if the action is nonviolent.

By **polarization** we understand a social process in which the opposed poles of “us” and “them” grow further and further apart. This involves a mental construction of the image of the other that one builds up in his/her mind. (School for a Culture of Peace).

Research on polarization – just like research on conflicts – considers that a certain degree of polarization is positive because it allows social changes to be met. However, polarization is a social phenomenon that is wider than conflicts because it ends up forcing people to take a position even if they want to stay out of a conflict, and therefore polarization involves more risks than conflict.

Nowadays, the degree of polarization in Catalonia is moderate, but there is an inclination that it will get worse. A study done by the Catalan newspaper *El Periódico* calculated that, in October 2018, 58.8% of the population in Catalonia did not feel comfortable when talking about the independence debate, versus 38.8% of the people who did feel comfortable. Although the evolution of this phenomenon shows a tendency towards a lesser predisposition to talk (71.5% of the people in Catalonia supporting independence are prone to talk; 47.5% of non-independentists have a predisposition to talk), 58.8% is not a catastrophic percentage.

<sup>1</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Yellow ribbons have been used in Catalonia since 2017 to show support for the imprisoned pro-independence leaders, considered *political prisoners* by the independentist side. Recently, these ribbons have become one of the main symbols for the independence of Catalonia. That is why the presence of these ribbons in the streets or on public buildings such as town councils has created confrontation.

The use of symbols from both sides (flags and yellow ribbons<sup>1</sup> in public spaces), the continuous utilization of certain words (“traitors”, “trench diggers”, “fascists”, “equidistant” – meaning ‘neutral’ or ‘equally distant from the two poles’ –, etc.), and the fierce criticism of public figures on both sides in social networks are some of the indicators of the existing level of tension.

## NONVIOLENCE

The Catalonia-Spain conflict also involves challenges related to social strategy. More than a few organizations – especially those with a clearer position in relation to the conflict – appeal to citizens’ mobilization. Although there are opinions on both sides in favor of violent means, the widespread choice is nonviolence. But is nonviolent action useful?

**Nonviolence** (in one single word) happens when one takes action in order to end the other’s violence. **Nonviolence** is a translation of the word conceptualized by Gandhi, *ahimsa*, which combines the ideas of pacifism and action. Nonviolence does not only reject violence, but it also promotes an active attitude for changing the internal violence that lies in the people and in the violent structures of our society (Barbeito, 2017: 147).

Many theorists and strategists argue that violence is useful in order to meet social change. These are positions defended both by the right and the left, both by the states (Clausewitz, Huntington) and insurgent groups (Mao, Guevara).

Amongst the main authors that have reflected on nonviolent action, some of them (Sharp, Chenoweth) argue that nonviolence has been used because it is the strategy that better works for actors with lesser power (**pragmatic nonviolence**). Meanwhile, other theorists (Thoreau, Gandhi, Arias, Xirinacs) consider that the strategy can only be nonviolent, because the resource of violence is illegitimate and soils the pursued target (**ethical nonviolence**) (Boserup & Mack, 2001). Ethical nonviolence is based on the conception that conflict is a positive fact, which recognizes the legitimacy of the Other's values and needs.

### ***Intercultural perspective of nonviolence***

Just as peace is not understood equally in the East (more emphasis on the personal dimension of peace), in the West (more emphasis on the social dimension of peace), or in indigenous cultures (more emphasis in caring for nature), nonviolence is also understood differently depending on the culture.

Broadly speaking, nonviolence under the western conception is understood as a process of social change that leads to political emancipation (many times applied and investigated in the context of a dictatorial regime's fall).

Nonviolence inspired by Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism puts much more emphasis on the search for the truth in relation to the other (*satyagraha* implies seeking justice in the cause, and a predisposition to change one's own opinion if the Other's arguments are just). Gandhi's viewpoint also involves a change of model at all levels of the society (not only at the political level, but also economic and social: *sarvodaya*, search for everybody's welfare), consistent with a nonviolence spirit focused on people.

Bearing in mind this intercultural distinction, we understand that in Catalan the same word is used to refer to multiple concepts that are differentiated in other cultures. Nonviolence is a very broad concept that includes a great amount of strategies (Gene Sharp identifies three methods of nonviolent action: persuasion and protest, nonviolent non-

cooperation, and nonviolent intervention) and tactics (Sharp accounted for 198 in 1973). Thus, we can infer that non-cooperation and civil disobedience are forms of nonviolent action, but not the only ones.

**Civil disobedience** is an organized, public, and collective way not to attack but to protest against a law that is considered unfair with the purpose of abolishing or modifying this specific law.

Civil disobedience was first theorized by Henry Thoreau in the 19th century. He talked about his actions to resist his taxes being used to finance the war of the United States against Mexico, and to oppose the law that legalized slavery in his country.

**Non-cooperation:** Group of social, economic, and political planned measures (strikes, boycotts, etc.) to undermine the bases of a state's power.

Then, one of the main differences between civil disobedience and non-cooperation is that civil disobedience focuses on a specific law of a state, while non-cooperation takes aim at the state in general. Non-cooperation can be a hidden act (slowdowns,<sup>2</sup> small undercover sabotages...), whereas civil disobedience actions are public.

<sup>2</sup> A *slowdown* is a type of discreet strike in which workers pretend to work and cooperate with the authorities, but they actually perform their duties as little as possible, with the purpose of obstructing the economic system

### **Gender perspective in nonviolence**

Most nonviolent authors highlight the need for sacrifice and suffering in nonviolent action. Therefore, there are numerous references of nonviolent fights in which a part of the nonviolent actions consist of a mass of people being beaten and suppressed by the police.

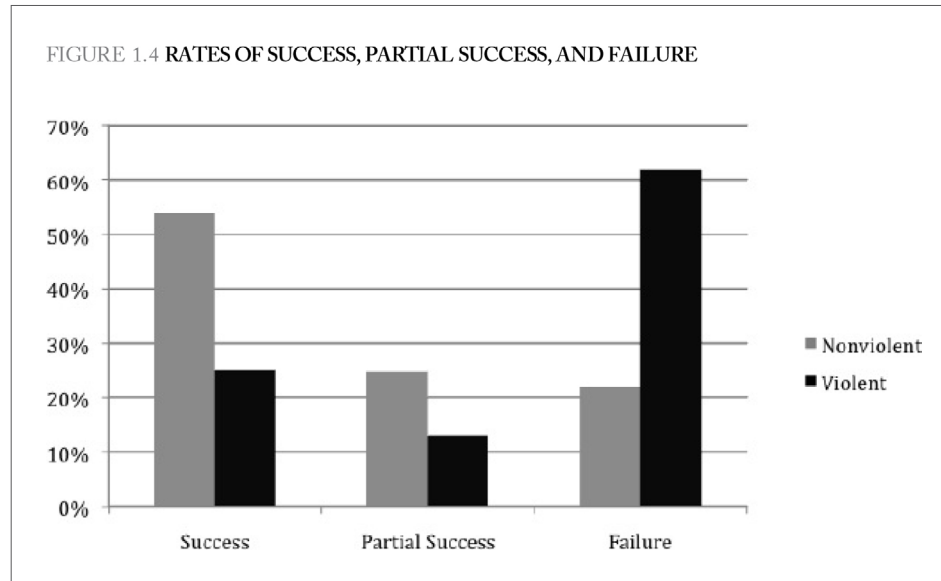
But the feminist (re)view of nonviolence refuses unnecessary suffering. Assuming the analysis that the world involves enough violence and there is no need to inflict more pain to oneself, feminists detach themselves from the types of nonviolence that seek to put one's own body at the risk of violence. As stated by the women in the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group (International Catalan Institute for Peace): we are also willing to suffer, but we do not seek suffering as a valuable fact in itself (2017: 54).

There are few comparative studies on the effectiveness of nonviolence; furthermore, the degree of self-sacrifice is not usually a variable that



is considered. The main study on the effectiveness of violence and nonviolence, made by the authors Chenoweth and Stephan, leads to conclusions in favor of nonviolence: Their research analyzes the effectiveness of 323 violent and nonviolent campaigns performed between 1900 and 2006 with the aim of changing a regime or territory (anti-occupation or secession). As stated by the researchers, 60% of the surveyed violent campaigns failed, and a bit over 20% were successful. On the contrary, 50% of the surveyed nonviolent campaigns succeeded, and 20% of them failed.

**Figure 5.2.**  
Effectiveness of nonviolent and violent campaigns (1900-2006).  
Source: [Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011:24.](#)



According to the authors, the main reason for nonviolent mobilizations to be more effective than violent ones is that nonviolent actions have a higher mobilization capacity than violent ones (an average 3.5% of the population in a country takes action in nonviolent campaigns). It is also connected to the fact that nonviolent actions are more prone to divide a regime, whilst violent actions usually unite a regime against the attacks.

Although this research is considered valid and it is accepted that nonviolence is a more effective strategy than violence, there are some challenges that are difficult to resolve, such as establishing the line that divides nonviolence/violence, and/or managing emotions.

<sup>3</sup> TN: The Holi Fest was a counter-demonstration (with the traditional Indian color powders thrown to the Catalan police, Mossos d'Esquadra) against a tribute event organized in Barcelona by the police association Jusapol to honor the police performance (Spanish Civil Guard and National Police) during the Catalan independence referendum on October 1st 2017. The police action on October 1st was accused of having applied an excessive and unnecessary use of force.

Given the fact that any action (road blockades, strikes, sabotages) carries a certain degree of violence, it is not easy to identify what is the acceptable limit of (non)violent methods. In Catalonia, some recent examples brought into discussion what is considered violence and what is not, like the protest Holi Fest where the demonstrators threw colored powder at the mossos (Catalan police) in September 2018,<sup>3</sup> or when demonstrators took to the streets and set dumpsters on fire the week after the imprisoned Catalan political leaders were convicted of

sedition and misappropriation in October 2019 for previously holding what was considered an illegal referendum by the courts.

The line of what is considered violence against the others can be different for each person, and the actions in the streets can result in chaotic situations. Therefore, it is important that each organization and each person reach a consensus of what are the admissible and inadmissible limits.

At the same time, it must also be taken into account that conflict situations often lead to overwhelming emotions, frustrations, etc. In these contexts it is particularly difficult to appeal to nonviolence. So, as mentioned before, it is necessary to recognize one's own emotions and limits in order to be emotionally prepared as an individual and/or as a group.

## DIÀLEGS CONTROVERTITS

Many voices demand dialogue to solve the Catalan issue. Sure enough, dialogue and negotiation are very important means of conflict resolution. But not everything is valid in a dialogue. The most important element of a dialogue is to listen with an open mind – much more than to speak – and to be willing to understand the Other.

Indeed, well-understood dialogue is different from debate. In a debate participants aim to demonstrate that they are right, to argue properly, to convince the others, and to win in that debate. But in a dialogue, the goals are very different: dialogue intends to broaden the points of view, expand thinking, and understand the Other (Caireta & Barbeito, 2019: 8):

By **debate** we understand a conversation or discussion between two persons or groups with different arguments, usually perceived as opposing, with the purpose of reaffirming one's own position and convincing the others of one's own point-of-view (competitive structure).

A **dialogue** is a conversation or discussion between two persons or groups with different arguments, in which they recognize the legitimacy of the Other's opinions through listening, empathy, and willingness to enrich one's own opinion with the contributions of the Other (cooperative structure).

Dialogues can take place at a political level (at this level they frequently involve a negotiation, apart from a dialogue), but also at a social level. This second and more communitarian level (neighborhoods,

organizations, trade unions, educational institutions, enterprises, etc.) plays an essential role in solving the issues that polarize society.



**For a closer look...**

If you want to learn more about how to deal with controversial issues and discover activities for dialogue, see: [Managing Controversy: Developing a Strategy for Handling Controversy and Teaching Controversial Issues in Schools.](#) (Council of Europe). [Discrepancia bienvenida. Guía pedagógica para el diálogo controvertido en el aula](#) (in Spanish). (Caireta & Barbeito. School for a Culture of Peace)

Disposition to a real dialogue requires several attitudes of openness. Herbolzheimer recommends putting curiosity, respect, and self-criticism into practice: If we have curiosity to understand how the other person thinks, if we have respect for people beyond their ideas, and if we maintain an attitude of self-criticism or of critical reflection in order not to fall into the trap of believing that we have the absolute truth, it will enormously help us, as a society, to be able to live with conflict, divergence and even with polarization without being harmed (Herbolzheimer, 2019).

More specifically about the dialogue process in itself, Caireta & Barbeito (2019: 20-23) warn of the biases that might affect each opposing point of view in a discussion about controversial or polarizing issues. They describe how to identify and neutralize these biases.

Cognitive bias	How is the bias visible?	How can we counteract the bias?
<p><b>Confirmation bias:</b> Tendency to pay selective attention, interpretation, memory, and attribution to the facts, which reinforces what we already think from the start.</p>	<p>Expressions like: “More and more I’m convinced that...”, “As I think the matter over and over, I increasingly believe that ...”.</p>	<p>— Ask “What new ideas did you learn?”, “What surprised you of what was said in the debate?” — Do activities that make you argue the contrary of what you think.</p>
<p><b>Naïf realism bias:</b> Tendency to believe that our worldview is objective, while the people with opinions different from ours think this way because they are misinformed, manipulated, irrational or biased.</p>	<p>Expressions such as: “You are wrong, the truth is...”, or “I’m right”, “The others are manipulated”.</p>	<p>— Draw attention to the fact that all media has an editorial line and defend certain values. — Highlight that, at least in social sciences, there exist no absolute realities, but perceptions of different factors.</p>
<p><b>Group attribution mistake</b> (or stereotypes): Tendency to believe that the characteristics of a person are extensible to the group he/she belongs to, or that the decision of a group represents the preferences of every person in that group.</p>	<p>— Stereotyping of other people’s or groups’ opinions or acts: “the Latinos...”, “the poor...”, “politicians...”. — Showing little or no consideration for the diversity of opinions within the other group.</p>	<p>— Draw attention to the fact that simplified generalizations are being used. — Ask whether the statements are true for everyone. — Ask people who belong to the mentioned group if they see it in the same way.</p>
<p><b>Intragroupal favoritism:</b> Tendency to be more sympathetic towards the reasons given by the members of one’s own group than to the other group’s arguments.</p>	<p>— Expression of value judgments with contempt about what the others say or do. — Expression of empathy towards one’s own group: “This happened because... (understandable reason).</p>	<p>— Draw attention to the fact that the same scale is not being used to evaluate one’s actions and the others’. — Ask for empathy to be shown towards the others. — Do role plays in which the opinion you have to defend is not your own.</p>

**Figure 5.3.** Signs of biases and measures to counteract them in a debate or dialogue. Source: Adapted from Caireta & Barbeito, 2019: 20-23

Cognitive bias	How is the bias visible?	How can we counteract the bias?
<p><b>Reactive evaluation bias:</b> Tendency not to consider or to despise an option because it was proposed by an opponent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Disrespect for the opinions of those one perceives as the Others.</li> <li>— Non-receptivity or closure when the other is talking (arms folded, not looking at the face, etc.).</li> <li>— Interruptions, noises, insults, or not allowing people with a contrary opinion to talk.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Ask what of the other’s ideas convinced you the most.</li> <li>— Evaluate the quality of our listening.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Authority bias:</b> Tendency to give a greater credibility to the opinions or arguments given by people with more authority, power, or rank.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— No questioning or less questioning of the people with a greater authority within the group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Ask first the people with less power within the group.</li> <li>— Draw attention to what topics each person is more apt to express an opinion about.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Attraction effect:</b> Tendency to get influenced by what the majority says.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— No questioning of what the majority says.</li> <li>— Underrepresentation of the minority groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Question all interventions equally, including those accepted by the majority.</li> <li>— Recognize the “wisdom of minorities” as a principle.</li> <li>— Make sure that there is a place for minority opinions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>False consensus bias:</b> Tendency to overestimate the amount of people who share one’s own opinions, values, beliefs, habits, and customs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Expressions like: “Everybody knows that...”, “Most people think that...”</li> <li>— Use of the plural “we” instead of “me” to confer more truth to oneself.</li> <li>— Simplification of positions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Talk in first person.</li> <li>— Highlight nuances within majority positions.</li> </ul>

Promoting dialogue – instead of debate – is a necessary condition to preserve a sufficient degree of coexistence in spite of polarization of any kind. However, to show an attitude open to dialogue might not be enough, and more actions to restore the social fabric may be required.

Thus, in connection with the conflict situation in Catalonia, it is noteworthy to evaluate what role each one plays in polarization and what role one wants to play within one's polarizing axis (to make a problem visible), while evaluating how this affects the people and the groups living together. It is also important to recognize what actions one wishes to perform and what limits of nonviolence/violence will be respected, as well as to share dialogue between persons with different opinions about this conflict.



## SELF-STUDY ACTIVITY

1. Watch this video. Then argue what is nonviolence for you and in which specific actions you would set your personal limit (which degree of coercion-violence you would be willing to inflict on the other):

· Video by the journalist Albert Lloreta “About violence and Democratic Tsunami (for concerned people)” (in Catalan with English subtitles)

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2. Empathy activity: Think of a position about the Catalan conflict that is quite different to yours and gain information about its arguments (talking to people with this position, reading the press which has an affinity to this opinion, etc.). Then, write a page explaining their position.

Once you have done this, re-read your writing and check if it contains value judgments towards the position of the Other, and whether you think you achieved a sincere enough empathy exercise.

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## WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

In order to become a peace agent in the Catalonia-Spain conflict, you can organize some of these actions:

### ***Empathize with the Other***

A requirement to be able to solve a conflict like the one dealt with in this unit is to recognize that the sides within the conflict and their political projects are legitimate, and try to understand what the other's needs are.

Humanizing the Other, recognizing his/her emotions, and trying to understand the other people's fears and needs are important first steps towards understanding in a conflict.

### ***Organize a dialogue activity in your environment***

It is important that we demand for the political class to have a dialogue, but this does not exclude us, as a society, from taking responsibility to promote social dialogue.

Gather a dozen friends and acquaintances with different positions in relation to the Catalonia-Spain conflict, and invite them to a dialogue activity.

If you want to ensure that the activity is safe and promotes empathy, you can suggest a feeling round, in which each participant tells his/her emotions about the conflict by explaining what positive or negative impacts the conflict has had on him/her.

### ***Get training on nonviolence***

If you want to promote nonviolent protests, first get some training either individually and/or with your affinity group.

Training Courses:

- [International Center on Nonviolent Conflict](#)
- [The Center for Nonviolent Communication](#)

Written resources:

- [\*The Path of Most Resistance. A Step-by-Step Guide to Planning Nonviolent Campaigns\*](#) (ICNC). ICNC has a [resource library](#) with publications in many different languages.
- [\*Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns\*](#) (War Resisters' International).





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## OTHER RESOURCES OF INTEREST

### About dialogue:

Kialo: Website to facilitate dialogues about controversial issues, in which the different arguments are graphically displayed. Some debates such as the following refer to Catalonia.

### About nonviolence:

International Center on Nonviolent Conflict: Website with numerous resources (including training courses and an online resource library in different languages) to learn about nonviolent action.

Move Nonviolence: Animation unit plans to learn and spread arguments in favor of nonviolence.

Noviolencia: compilation of experiences and publications on nonviolence, with an emphasis on Spanish authors and experiences (in Spanish, but has links to many organizations with websites in English).

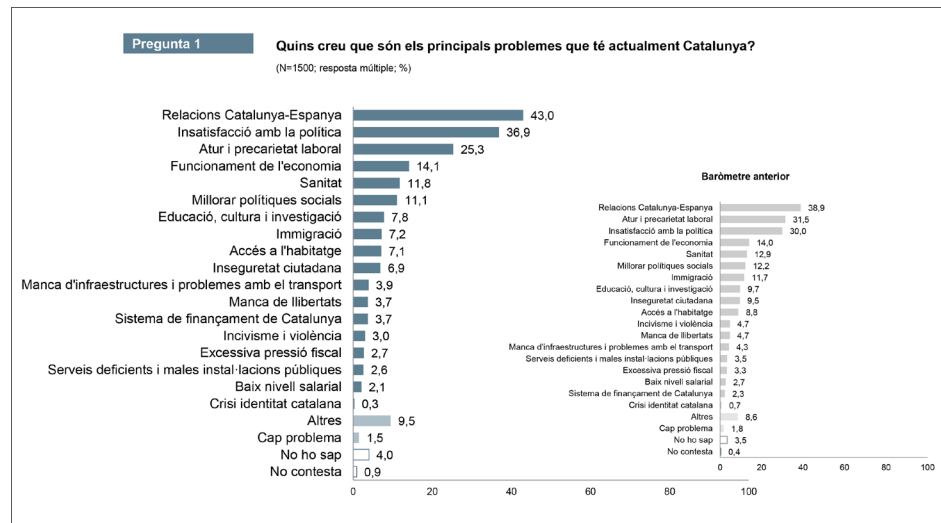
### Other Catalan organizations and material:

En Peu de Pau

Lluita Noviolenta

Video "Què és no-violència i què no és violència en la causa justa de Catalunya" (minutes 17:25-34:20)

# ANNEX



**Figure 5.1**

Question 1

*What are in your opinion the main problems today in Catalonia?*

(N=1500; multiple answer; %)

- Catalonia-Spain Relations
- Dissatisfaction with politics
- Unemployment and job insecurity
- Functioning of the economy
- The Health system
- Improvement of social policies
- Education, culture, and research
- Immigration
- Access to housing
- Citizens' insecurity
- Lack of infrastructures and problems with transport
- Lack of freedoms
- Catalonia's financial system
- Civic irresponsibility and violence
- Excessive fiscal pressure
- Deficient services and poor public facilities
- Low salary level
- Catalan identity crisis
- Other
- No problems
- Does not know
- No reply

