Fighting against Bullfighting: Tackling Spain's Bloody Tradition

Genevieve Hoyt
Salve Regina University, genevieve.hoyt@salve.edu

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Fighting against Bullfighting: Tackling Spain’s Bloody Tradition

Genevieve Hoyt

Salve Regina University
Global Studies Capstone
Dr. Gomaa
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1. Abstract

Bullfighting has grown to be a serious problem in Spain, bringing severe animal cruelty, economic controversies, and a national identity crisis. This paper synthesizes research from a variety of sources to comprehensively evaluate the problems bullfighting causes in Spain, and it also proposes two policy options to attempt to resolve these issues. While banning bullfighting entirely may seem like an easy fix, it would also provoke a number of issues. This paper will ultimately conclude that bullfighting will likely come to an end on its own. Still, anti-bullfighting groups should continue their protests in order to decrease popularity and encourage provincial bans, eventually leading to the sport’s demise.
2. Introduction

2.1 Background

“Tortura no es arte ni cultura” is a slogan coined by the Spanish anti-bullfighting movement, which translates to “torture is neither art nor culture” (Beilin 64). Today, bullfighting is wildly popular around Southwestern Europe and Latin America (Brandes 780), but within the past 20 years, the anti-bullfight movement has materialized as animal rights activists, human rights activists, economists, political parties, and Spanish citizens have publicly denounced bullfighting. In a Spanish bullfight, the “matador,” or the bullfighter, fights a huge black bull in a coliseum while an audience cheers on the matador. Throughout the fight, the matador taunts the bull by waving a cape, encouraging him to charge (pictured in Figure 1). As the animal exhausts himself, the matador plants long spikes in the bull’s back, aiming to make the bull bleed. Eventually, the animal dies and the crowd cheers for the man’s victory (Richardson).

Bullfighting is legal in eight countries throughout Europe and Latin America: Spain, France, Portugal, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Ecuador (“Bullfighting” Humane Society International). In each of these countries, the bull is killed after the fight, either in front of the spectators or in privacy. Even though bullfighting is legal in only these eight countries, different variations of bullfighting still exist in other countries around the world, such as the United States and India. In the United States, bloodless bullfights are legal in California if held
for religious celebrations, and although the bull is not injured, it is still teased and taunted, resulting in exhaustion. It is debated whether bullfighting even has any religious connections, or if this is just used as an excuse. After competing once, most bulls in California are then sent to a slaughterhouse because they have become too “ring savvy” and too dangerous to use in a second fight (Velez). Jallikattu, a form of bull running, is practiced in southern India. This variation involves releasing bulls into a crowd, forcing the bulls to fend off people trying to ride them. The sport was banned in 2014, but after violent protests involving the Indian people and police, the ban was lifted in January 2017 (Jallikattu). Bullfighting is practiced all over the world in different regional variations, frequently bringing along with it conflict and chaos.

Catalonia, the northeastern region of Spain which includes the city of Barcelona, successfully passed a law banning bullfighting in 2010 and the law went into effect in 2012. In a change of events, however, Spain’s constitutional court overturned the ban in 2016, claiming it was unconstitutional and a matter to be handled solely by the central government. For years Catalonia has been trying to gain independence from the Spanish state; therefore, this ban on bullfighting “was seen by many as an attempt by Catalan nationalists to distinguish the region from the rest of Spain” (Badcock, “Catalan Bullfights”). Many Spaniards who do agree with bullfighting proudly identify as citizens under the state of Spain; however, the Catalans who stand against the sport say that bullfighting is yet another one of the aspects of the Spanish state that they want nothing to do with, fueling their fight to separate from Spain. After the state overturned the ban in Catalonia, thousands marched through the streets of the nation’s capital city of Madrid, demanding an end to bullfighting. They held signs reading “Bullfighting, the school of cruelty” and “Bullfighting, a national shame” (Badcock, “Catalan Bullfights”). In an
attempt to preserve its “cultural heritage,” Spain will not allow a ban on bullfighting in any of its provinces (Burgen).

2.2 Brief Overview: What contributes to the problem?

2.2a Animal rights

Bullfighting is an issue at the forefront of many animal welfare organizations’ agendas. Every year, thousands of bulls are killed in Spain alone during bullfights. In Spanish, the bullfighter is named the “matador,” which literally translates to killer. The “bullfight” is far from a fight, as the bull is guaranteed to lose its life in every round. The matador and his assistants aim to physically debilitate and psychologically torment the bull for twenty minutes. During this time, men on horses approach the bull and drive lances into its back and neck, injuring its muscles and impairing the bull’s ability to lift its head. The crowd cheers at the sight of blood dripping down the bull’s weak body, so the men are sure to twist and push the lances to cause more blood loss, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Meanwhile, men on foot attempt to distract the animal and stab it with colorful darts. Once the bull has become weak and dizzy, the matador finally appears. After encouraging the dying bull to charge a few more times, the matador stabs the bull with his sword in order to finally kill it. If he only mutilates it further, an executioner is called in to stab it to death. After the bull is dragged out of the arena, another bull is brought in to
face the same cycle yet again (“Bullfighting: A Tradition of Tragedy,” PETA). In a single fight, six bulls are fought and murdered (Steves). The cruelty in a bullfight is obvious, which has attracted the attention of animal activists all over the world.

2.2b Social justice issues

In addition to the issue of animal cruelty, bullfighting also raises a plethora of social justice issues. Bullfighting is big business, and as such, it plays a role in not only Spain’s economy but also the economy of the European Union (EU). In the past decade, local governments have had to cut budgets due to declining tax revenue, preventing them from being able to continue to subsidize bullfights. This phenomenon has caused a consistent drop in the number of Spanish bullfights in the past ten years. However, while smaller towns are unable to afford bullfighting, larger cities are still continuing the tradition despite “the country’s debt woes coupled with 20 percent unemployment and government austerity spending cuts” (“Can Spanish Bullfighting Survive Bans, Economy?” 2010). Spain could put this money toward increasing employment, but instead they choose to financially aid bullfighting. As seen in Figure 4, Spain receives 7.5 billion Euros overall from the EU per year, and it puts 8.3 billion Euros toward rural development. To make matters worse, Spain is putting 130 million Euros of EU agricultural subsidies toward the bullfighting industry every year, which equates to nearly 155 million US dollars. This money is intended to subsidize food production and support sustainable practices, but instead it is put
toward raising bulls which are used for entertainment ("Reality Check," 2016). A 2013 study concluded that without such heavy subsidies from the EU, “[bullfighting] would probably be on the brink of financial collapse” (Badcock, “EU Cuts Subsidies”).

2.2c Spanish identity

Bullfights continue today in Spain mainly because of tradition, rather than modern Spanish culture. Bullfights represent a culture which is quickly dying in such a progressive nation. “The bullfight does not necessarily reflect current social structure and values anywhere in Spain; rather, it is the product of a fast-disappearing (if not absent) culture that is preserved in language and lingering attitudes” (Douglass 244). Bullfighting does not fit within the culture of Spain. After joining the EU, the new Spain has developed into one of the most progressive countries of Europe, actually becoming the third European country to legalize same-sex marriage. Therefore, a blood sport like bullfighting seems archaic. Spain does not maintain bullfighting out of an appreciation for tradition; it simply keeps the sport alive because it is big business that pulls in tourists and their dollars (Brandes 789).

2.3 Urgency

In 2008, about 3,300 bullfights were held in Spain. In every bullfight, 6 bulls are killed. Thus, in 2008, around 19,800 bulls were slaughtered in Spain alone for public entertainment (“Bullfighting” PETA). Overall, about 250,000 bulls die worldwide per year (“Bullfighting” Humane Society International). Although bulls are bred and killed at alarming rates, bullfighting must be dealt with urgently for social justice reasons, as well. Spain receives subsidies from the European Union that it gives to star fighters and small elite groups within the bullfighting industry, rather than lending the money to crucial issues in Spain, such as fighting the
unemployment crisis, decreasing high rates of child poverty, improving social programs, or simply building more hospitals and schools (“Can Spanish Bullfighting Survive Bans, Economy?” 2010). Not only is bullfighting a vital issue to address, but these other social justice issues are in need of immediate funding. If bullfighting was banned, more money could be put toward these urgent issues affecting Spanish citizens today.

2.4 Statement of purpose

This paper proposes policy options aimed at decreasing the animal rights, social justice, and national identity issues that have escalated in Spain as a result of the popular bullfighting sport. Bullfighting is a universal issue that affects not only Spaniards but also citizens of the EU, United States, and Latin America. This paper will introduce a policy which bans bullfighting throughout Spain, and this option will subsequently be compared with a partial ban in Catalonia. Additionally, a second option will be proposed which involves opening the country to bullfighting and allowing the sport to exist as it is; thus, the paper will examine the social, political, and economic repercussions of allowing the sport to thrive into the future.

2.5 Methodology

Through examination of policy papers, scholarly articles, non-fiction books, news reports, case studies, and economic statistics, this paper will evaluate the problems linked to bullfighting and possible policies to minimize these issues. I lived in Seville, Spain for a year, so I have asked a local about her family’s opinion on bullfighting; her statements are included in this paper. While in Spain, I toured one of the country’s most famous bullrings located in Seville and I visited the museum attached to the arena. I speak Spanish fluently, so this paper will reference both English and Spanish sources.
A limitation of this study is the minimal amount of exact statistics available to the public regarding bullfighting. A 2013 report by Green MEPs on bullfighting in Spain notes that ‘‘facts and figures about bullfighting are difficult to attain’ and ‘lines of funding are difficult to track’’ (‘‘Reality Check,’’ 2016). The EU gives subsidies to Spanish farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which are intended to go toward food production and sustainable farming practices. However, “the EU has no legal power to stop Spanish farmers [from] raising and selling bulls for bullfighting using CAP money - it's a matter for Spanish national law” (‘‘Reality Check,’’ 2016). Technically this money is going toward food production, but Spain underhandedly puts it toward raising bulls for bullfighting; therefore, statistics on this topic are difficult to locate. Additionally, Spain does not release information on numbers of bulls killed per year in bullfights, so the only sources which estimate these figures are from animal welfare organizations that have instigated their own research. This information changes every year depending on the number of bullfights held in the country. Finally, the profits gained from bullfights are not publically accessible, so it is difficult to understand exactly how much the Spanish economy is benefiting from bullfighting.

2.6 Course of the policy paper

The paper will begin by thoroughly evaluating the problems caused by the bullfighting industry in Spain. Animal rights issues will be concentrated on first. Many animal rights groups have protested against bullfighting, claiming it is animal abuse and goes against human ethics and morals. The issue of hypocrisy among meat eaters who are horrified with bullfighting will also be addressed, along with a connection between bullfighting and human terrorism. The next section will cover social justice issues as a result of bullfighting. Spanish bullfighting can be seen as helping the national economy while simultaneously hurting the economies of smaller towns.
The paper will further investigate EU subsidies put toward bullfighting, and the idea of bullfighting as big business in Spain. The last major debate sparked by bullfighting is confusion on the Spanish national identity. One of the main reasons bullfighting still exists is that it is seen as tradition and a fundamental part of the Spanish identity. The paper will study Spaniards’ interest in bullfighting by citing statistics on the number of Spanish citizens who attend bullfights versus tourists who reside outside of Spain, as well as quotes from Spanish citizens stating their opinion on the sport. Bullfighting was banned in Catalonia, a northern autonomous community of Spain, for four years, so this section will identify what differentiates the mindset of Catalonians from the rest of Spain. The second half of the paper will suggest a policy to reduce the issues brought on by bullfighting, as well as a study on the possible future of Spain if bullfighting remains as it is today. Although bullfighting is detrimental to Spain in numerous ways, it still endures today with several positive aspects. Many people employed through the bullfighting industry would lose their jobs if bullfighting was banned. With the unemployment crisis at an all time high in Spain, these Spaniards would be forced to face the challenge of finding another job if bullfighting came to an end (Douglass 246). Additionally, Spain currently subsidizes bullfighting, so the government would have to decide where to put this money if bullfighting was banned (“Reality Check,” 2016). The first policy, which proposes a ban on bullfighting, will identify solutions to these problems, while the second option will look at Spain’s future if bullfighting was allowed to thrive nationwide.
3. Problem Description

3.1 Ethics

One of the strongest and most popular arguments against bullfighting emphasizes the extreme animal abuse, as explained previously in section 1.2a. In 2008, around 19,800 bulls were slaughtered in Spain alone for public entertainment (“Bullfighting” PETA). Although this cruelty is blatant and undeniable, the only law in Spanish history that protects animals conveniently excludes the bullfight. It reads, “Those who cruelly mistreat domestic animals or other kinds of animals in unauthorized public spectacles will be punished by a penalty of ten to sixty days” (Bailey 28). The government encourages the torture of bulls in bullrings, as these are authorized public areas.

Today, many people are horrified by bullfighting, but it is essentially only the aspect of public entertainment that makes it so horrific. This cruelty exists in countries all around the world, including the United States. The difference is that a barrier exists which marks the people as “civilized.” The meat which Americans consume is wrapped in plastic and bears no resemblance to the animal it was. Americans consume meat for pleasure, just as bullfighting shows exist purely for pleasure. To shame bullfighting while continuing to support the meat industry is hypocritical (Bailey 33-34). Bailey writes, “…I think that what permits the hypocrite to condemn bullfighting while ignoring the mass production and slaughter of animals is that the one practice is generally hidden beneath a veneer of civility while the other one celebrates itself a transcendence of that social order” (34). After a bullfight, the bull is even sent to a slaughterhouse for eventual human consumption, so a fighting bull only differentiates from animals in a slaughterhouse in that a bullfight is a public spectacle (Thompson).
Most people attend a bullfight eager to see a legitimate, fair fight of man versus beast, yet this is far from the truth. In reality, the bullfight is almost entirely a fraud, rigged to ensure man wins and beast dies every round. Bulls are made less dangerous in a number of ways, as seen in Figure 5: their horns are shaved without anesthesia; four-hundred pound sandbags are piled onto their shoulders; they are injected with sedatives before a show; they are overfed; or they are forced to carry around excessive weight, distorting their frames (Mitchell 133). Even immediately before the show the bull’s eyes could be smeared with petroleum jelly to blur his vision, or his nostrils stuffed with wet newspaper to impede on his breathing (Duignan).

Intentional violence exercised by humans on animals can be connected to human war. Just as Spain’s animal cruelty laws conveniently exclude the bullfight, humans will also claim to respect basic human rights while making conditions to exclude other humans. “Torture is also forbidden, unless you practice it in Guantanamo, on people whose skin is darker than yours. And terrorism is prosecuted relentlessly, except when it involves bombing Iraq. Cultural anomalies, ‘what are you going to do?’ but these don’t clear one of the realization that terrorism is terrorism even if I am the one practicing it” (Beilin 69). Humans make laws in society that seem beneficial on the surface, but these laws are shaped to benefit those who create the laws, even if that means hurting others. Bullfighters are by no means courageous or virtuous for torturing innocent animals. As philosopher Steven Best writes, “If bullfighting is an ‘art form,’ then so are
ritualistic cult killings. If bullfighting is ‘authentic religious drama,’ so too is war and genocide. If the matador is ennobled, let us praise every mass murderer” (Duignan). People all over the world encourage bullfighting as a great “art” while actively protesting against human war. Spain protects most animals while carelessly murdering bulls, and claims it is an act of art and culture.

3.2 Economy of Spain

Bullfighting is big business. As further explained in section 1.2b, bullfighting plays a great role in Spain’s economy, and Spain even subsidizes the industry using money from the EU. In order for Spain to become an EU member, many believed bullfighting would have to stop; however, the EU made a “cultural exception” (Bailey 26). Spain dedicates huge tracts of land to the raising of fighting bulls. Bullfights receive €25.5 million from local governments per year. In 2015, the northern city of A Coruna decided to stop giving €50,000 in bullfight subsidies, and the small town of Villafranca de los Caballeros started to lend its €18,000 in bullfight subsidies toward children’s education instead. Julián Bolaños, who served as mayor of Villafranca de los Caballeros at the time, expressed that many families in small towns do not even have the money to buy school supplies for their children. As seen in Figure 6, in May of 2017 protesters in Madrid demanded an end to bullfighting. To the right of the photo, one demonstrator holds a sign reading “Tus impuestos pagan esto,” or “Your taxes pay for this,” with an image of a bloody bull. There is heavy unemployment in northern, rural towns, so these Spaniards simply cannot afford to give money away to bullfighting spectacles (Fitzpatrick).
Part of the problem that results from a ban on bullfighting is the loss of jobs. The National Association of Bullfighting Event Organizers (ANOET) released a report claiming that in 2013, bullfighting directly employed 57,000 people directly and 142,000 people indirectly. According to this report, bullfighting contributed €1.6 billion to Spain, of which €423 million were gained directly from bullfighting; €361 million were from transport, hotels, and catering; and the remaining €820 million due to “supposed knock-on effects” (Fitzpatrick). It is unclear whether the earnings for hotel bookings can be directly linked to people traveling to see bullfights. Regardless, the industry has actually been in decline for years. Spain’s Culture Ministry reported that the number of bullfights held annually fell 60% between 2007 and 2014. However, many groups see this decline as purely a reflection of the nation’s economic struggles in general, meaning that when the economy improves, bullfighting will again increase in popularity (Fitzpatrick).

3.3 Identity, tradition, culture

Even through all the criticism regarding animal cruelty and economic consequences, pro-bullfighting groups still encourage the sport, claiming it is part of the Spanish culture and identity. However, a 2002 study found that about 70% of Spaniards had no interest in bullfighting, and that number has only continued to rise since (Bailey 24). The number of bullfighting aficionados in Spain fell from 50% in 1980 to only 10% in 2000 (Beilin 63). This statistic alone reflects the Spanish people’s rapidly declining interest in bullfighting, meaning that the industry is only staying alive through tourists. Millions of tourists visit Spain each year, and many of them will see a bullfight believing it expresses something profound about Spain (Brandes 780). Alejandro Penedo, a 24 year old from the southern region of Cadiz where bullfighting is heavily prevalent, wants an end to the sport. He says, “[My friends and I] think it
is ridiculous to maintain something just because it has always been a part of Spanish tradition. I mean, 200 years ago it was also socially acceptable to hit your wife. But times change. A cruel tradition like bullfighting just does not belong in a modern society any more” (Jobse). When asked how she believes bullfighting affects Spain, Rocío Oblaré Román, a middle-aged woman from Seville, says, “Currently, the population is extremely divided because many people like [bullfighting] and consider it an art, and others see it as slaughtering animals” [translation my own]. She points out that mostly tourists attend bullfights, and she herself has only ever been to one fight despite living in Seville her whole life. It is clear that bullfighting is in no way a local tradition, funded by local government and promoted to help the local economy. Rather, it is big business and participates like any other big business in a market economy (Brandes 780).

Spain is one of the most progressive nations of Europe, so bullfighting does not line up with the nation’s beliefs and sentiments. A popular old saying was “Africa begins at the Pyrenees” because for years Spain was so different from the rest of Europe, ruled by fascist dictatorship and suffering under economic stagnation and social retrogression. However, EU standards have helped to craft a new Spain. For example, the nation began to impose restrictions on alcohol consumption among the youth, and it built special facilities for the handicapped (Brandes 789). Spain was actually the third European country to legalize same-sex marriage, right after Belgium and the Netherlands. Even so, Belgium and the Netherlands created separate rights, not equal to those of heterosexuals. In fact, Spain was actually the first country in the world to fully eliminate all legal distinctions between same-sex and heterosexual unions (McLean). CBS news summarizes this issue in one quote: “Many parts of Madrid take you back many centuries. But don't be fooled - Spain is one of the most modern and progressive countries in Europe. Half the cabinet are women, including the defense minister. There is gay marriage,
quickie divorces, legalized abortion, and there is the ancient blood sport of bullfighting. How do you put that all together? It's not easy” (“Can Spanish Bullfighting Survive Bans, Economy?” 2010). A blood sport like bullfighting seems archaic in such a progressive nation.

Bullfighting has existed for thousands of years, and many believe that it began as a representation of male control over the female. The matador’s goal is to contain, control, and dominate the bull. Similarly, a man’s honor depended on the extent to which he could control his woman. Females in southern Spain must be controlled by men because on their own, they were dangerous and could upset the social order due to their “sexual nature” (Douglass 243). The ranch owner is held responsible for ensuring that the bull is physically a virgin when it enters the ring at age four or five. They are also virgins to the cape, meaning that they have never fought before. During a bullfight, the bull is not immediately killed; rather, the object is to make it bleed. This alludes to the breaking of the hymen, or male penetration of female (Douglass 243-245).

Further, bullfighting is commonly permitted for religious reasons. In the United States, bloodless bullfights are legal in California if held for religious celebrations. It is ironic that in a US state with strict anti-animal cruelty laws, bullfighting is legal. Although the bull is not injured, it is still teased and taunted, resulting in exhaustion. After competing once, most bulls in California are then sent to a slaughterhouse because they have become too “ring savvy” and too dangerous to use in a second fight. It is debated whether bullfighting even has any religious connections, or if this is just used as an excuse (Velez 503-506). In fact, Pope St. Pius V stated that shows such as bullfights are “removed from Christian piety and charity” and he believed these fights were “of the devil and not of man.” He forbade Christians to attend bullfights under penalty of excommunication (“Bullfighting: A Tradition of Tragedy,” PETA). Timothy Mitchell
examines this issue in his book *Blood Sport*. Bullfighting cannot be labeled a ritual, for in a ritual, “the officiant and the communicants are engaged in deliberately symbolic activity; their every word and action has an agreed-upon spiritual referent; moreover, everything is rigidly predetermined, nothing is left to chance” (169). A bullfight represents none of these qualities and is not even deliberately symbolic. Bullfighting is clearly not a religious ceremony, even though it is often permitted on religious grounds.

Bullfighting is tradition but not a representation of Spain’s present culture, and Catalonia has been attempting to ban bullfighting for a second time. As further described in section 1.1, bullfighting was banned in the northern autonomous community of Catalonia in 2012, but this ban was overturned by the constitutional court in 2016. Bullfighting is only one of the aspects of the Spanish state that Catalonians have been rallying against. In 2017, Catalonia experienced much internal conflict between its own residents as well as external conflict with the rest of Spain when it attempted to separate from Spain as an independent state (Abend). It is clear Catalonia has different values from Spain, and it identifies as a distinct state which does not share Spain’s culture and traditions. Bullfighting was a huge issue that Catalonia did not agree with, but when they finally banned it, the Spanish state overturned the ban only a few years later. Although it is clear that much of Spain is against bullfighting, it will be difficult for any province of Spain to successfully ban the sport in the future.

4. Option 1: Total Ban

4.1 Overview

A total ban on bullfighting throughout the country of Spain is one policy option to address the issue of bullfighting. In this case, every bullring in Spain would be used in the future
for other spectacles, such as sporting events or shows. Any farmers who raise livestock including bulls would either begin to raise these bulls for other uses or entirely stop breeding bulls. A ban on bullfighting in Spain would only directly affect the country of Spain; therefore, bullfighting would still be practiced in other countries around the world. A ban on bullfighting would not imply a ban on any praise of the bull or usage of the bull as a symbol of Spain’s identity or history. Although a total ban would eliminate many of the issues bullfighting has brought on, it would also pose a number of challenges.

4.2 Advantages

4.2a Decline in animal cruelty

One of the major arguments against bullfighting is the animal cruelty involved in a bullfight, and with a total ban on bullfighting throughout Spain, this would no longer be an issue. However, a ban on bullfighting would only cover the bullfights themselves, allowing other cruel practices involving bulls to continue to exist. For example, the Running of the Bulls would continue, which involves releasing bulls into a street crowded with people and prodding them along using electric shocks. During this run, the bulls often lose their footing on the cobblestone streets, sliding into walls and sustaining cuts and broken bones. After the run, the bulls are brought into an arena to commence a bullfight (Fruno). A ban on bullfighting would clearly decrease the animal cruelty present throughout Spain, but there are still other inhumane practices throughout the country that would remain unsettled. Nonetheless, a ban on bullfighting may encourage other nations to do the same, which would greatly decrease animal cruelty all around the world.
4.2b Unite Catalonia and Spain

Additionally, if bullfighting was banned, this may help to settle tensions between Catalonia and Spain. As discussed in section 2.3, Catalonia has made huge strides in its effort to separate from Spain and create its own independent state. One of the reasons it wanted autonomy was due to its differing values, including Catalonia’s stance against animal cruelty. If Spain showed that it was making an effort to share the progressive values of Catalonia, this may encourage Catalonia to remain a province under Spain. Currently, significant violence and conflict has been breaking out on the streets of Catalonia between pro and anti-unity protestors. Figure 7 displays thousands of people marching for a pro-independence demonstration in Barcelona. Therefore, a ban on bullfighting throughout Spain may suppress conflict and motivate Catalonia to remain part of Spain.

4.2c Subsidies

Spain subsidizes bullfighting with money that could be put instead toward social justice issues, such as the nation’s increasing unemployment or high rates of child poverty; therefore, a ban on bullfighting would force Spain to instead subsidize other urgent issues. If Spain put more money toward decreasing unemployment, its economy would consequently improve. If Spain further subsidized the construction of hospitals, schools, and infrastructure in general, this could improve both its economic and social sectors. However, the money put toward bullfighting
comes from Spain’s agriculture sector, so Spain may decide to simply further subsidize its food production rather than aiding serious social justice issues. Still, subsidies in its agriculture sector will go toward other causes, including “Investments in the forestry sector; …Organic farming; …[And] support for pilot projects and for the development of new products, practices, processes and technologies” (“Factsheet”). Thus, if Spain stops subsidizing bullfighting, this money will still be put to better use and will help Spaniards in some way.

4.3 Disadvantages

4.3a Loss of jobs

A major concern preventing Spain from banning the bullfighting industry is a loss of jobs, as detailed in section 2.2. The bullfighting industry employs nearly 200,000 people both directly and indirectly, so it is unclear what would happen to these jobs if the industry came to an end. Many spin-off jobs cater to bullfighting, including tailors, bullring priests, printing companies, doctors, transporters, meat sellers, newspaper critics, television crews, agents, and artists. Spain is already experiencing an unemployment crisis. If bullfighting was banned, many Spaniards would either lose business or lose their jobs entirely (Douglass 246).

4.3b National identity

Although this paper has already covered reasons why bullfighting is truly not part of the Spanish culture today (see section 2.3), some Spaniards still attend bullfights with the belief that it is in fact an important part of the Spanish identity. Therefore, as Fitzpatrick writes, bullfighting is “unlikely to go down…without a nasty fight.” A 2015 poll found that only 19% of Spaniards between the ages of 16 and 65 were in favor of bullfighting. Therefore, this 19% of Spain’s population may fight to keep bullfighting alive in their country. If bullfighting was in fact
banned, Spain would risk protests from pro-bullfighting lobbyists nationally and internationally. As seen in Figure 8, in March of 2016 pro-bullfighting supporters marched through the streets of Valencia, Spain as part of a protest rally in favor of bullfighting. This group marched with famous matadors to protest bans in some parts of Spain, “proclaiming the practice as a key element of cultural expression” (“Thousands protest in Spain”). Morante de la Puebla, a famous fighter, explained that those involved in bullfighting believe they are being treated poorly by the political class. During the march, he shouted, “‘We are here to say, this is our life, it’s a tradition’” (“Thousands protest in Spain”). Clearly, as more regions in Spain decide to ban bullfighting, more conflict will arise between the pro and anti-bullfighting populations who see the sport as part of Spain’s culture.

4.3c Tourism and the economy

A final argument against a ban on bullfighting is the negative impact this would have on tourism, ultimately hurting the nation’s economy. In 2015, Spain was the most common tourism destination in the EU for non-residents (see Figure 9). In that year alone, tourists spent 270 million nights in tourist accommodation establishments, which accounts for 21.3% of the EU total. It surpassed the next country, Italy, by more than 70 million nights. It is unclear exactly how many of these tourists came to Spain with the intention of attending a bullfight, but bullfighting did contribute €1.6 billion to Spain in 2013, which equates to about $1.86 billion (Fitzpatrick). In that year Spain gained $62.5 billion from international tourism receipts, or
expenditures by international inbound visitors (Barrientos), meaning that bullfighting accounted for 2.98% of the tourism in 2013. Therefore, if bullfighting was banned, only three percent of the tourism sector in Spain would be affected. This fact alone almost delegitimizes the argument that a ban on bullfighting would significantly harm the Spanish economy. Still, although three percent is not major, the tourism sector would lose upwards of two billion dollars. A ban on bullfighting would definitely hurt tourism, although the impact would be minor and would not devastate the economy.

4.4 Comparison: total versus partial ban

A total ban would both benefit and potentially hurt the nation in a variety of ways as just discussed; therefore, it is necessary to analyze the effects of a partial ban. Bullfighting was banned once in Catalonia (see section 2.3) but this ban only lasted four years. Thus, it is unlikely the Spanish court would allow another ban in a region of the country, such as Catalonia. There are 17 autonomous communities of Spain, and the only community in which bullfighting has even been fully banned is Catalonia. Throughout 2017, Catalonia has been attempting to separate from Spain and create its own independent state in the form of a republic. Consequently, many see a political side to the debate regarding a bullfighting ban. Bullfighting is well known as a Spanish tradition, and given that Catalans want to cut off culture ties from the rest of Spain, many people believe the ban is “not about animal rights but about politics,” and therefore Figure 9
“Catalonia has banned bullfighting because…some Catalan politicians want to separate Catalonia from Spain” (Jazeera). Almost immediately after Spain overturned the region’s ban in 2016, conflict broke out in Catalonia regarding its separation. Catalonia wanted the right to create its own laws, such as a ban on bullfighting, and when Spain disparaged the region by overturning its law, the nation saw great backlash from the Catalan people. If Catalonia was able to pass a partial ban on bullfighting today, this may further separate the region from the rest of Spain. Clearly, this could be seen as either an advantage or disadvantage.

A partial ban in Catalonia has many disadvantages compared to a nationwide ban. Even with the ban repealed, bullfighting is not popular in Catalonia or in the north of Spain in general. Therefore, there are not many bullfights in Catalonia. If bullfighting were to be banned, it would not make a huge difference in any respect. For example, it would not help to eliminate cruelty to bulls, as the majority of bullfights occur in Madrid and Andalucía. To truly decrease animal cruelty, bullfighting should be banned in one of these two communities. Unfortunately, there is little to no information publicly available regarding the economic effects of Catalonia’s four year ban on the rest of Spain, but it is necessary to keep in mind that bullfighting was not wildly popular in Catalonia even before the ban. Thus, the economic effects would have been greater had Madrid or Andalucía banned the sport.

A ban in only a region of Spain has many advantages over a nationwide ban. If one region bans bullfighting, a select number of jobs will be lost. However, this population can recover over a period of time. The idea of a partial ban will subsequently spread throughout Spain, possibly motivating other provinces to ban the sport as well. Therefore, Spain will not suffer a massive loss in jobs all at once. The people will gradually become employed in different industries over time. Additionally, if Catalonia banned bullfighting, the people of Catalonia
would be happier living in a community that follows their principles. Meanwhile, the other provinces of Spain which want to keep bullfighting will be able to do so, avoiding the conflict that would arise from a total ban. Finally, a partial ban would not be detrimental to the nation’s tourism. With a ban in Catalonia, tourists could still travel to the south of Spain to see a bullfight.

4.5 Feasibility

A total ban is realistically not feasible in the near future. Although only 9.5% of Spaniards went to a bullfighting event in 2015, there is “no compelling evidence that a majority of Spaniards want to ban bullfighting” (Badcock, “Will Spain ever ban bullfighting?”). Most Spaniards have no interest in bullfighting, yet they do not want to ban it. A poll was taken in 2010 for the popular El País newspaper in which 60% of Spaniards stated their aversion to bullfighting, but only 42% said they would ban the sport. Even with strong outside pressure from groups such as PETA and Humane Society International, bullfighting persists in Spain (Badcock, “Will Spain ever ban bullfighting?”). There is still a strong voice in support of the sport. A partial ban in Catalonia is more realistic, especially given that it was banned in the autonomous community once before. Spain’s constitutional court is located in Madrid, which is the country’s capital as well as one of the most popular provinces for bullfighting. Thus, it would be unlikely that the court would want to impose a nationwide ban. If Spain continues to view bullfighting as part of its “cultural heritage,” then a nationwide ban would be extremely unlikely, and even an individual province may not be able to uphold a ban without the constitutional court having the final say.

5. Option 2: No ban

5.1 Overview
Spain is currently taking no action to address the issues brought up by bullfighting. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze Spain’s future if bullfighting continues to be legal. In contrast to the first option, which proposed a policy to ban bullfighting entirely, this option takes no action against bullfighting. Although this option has several disadvantages such as not directly reducing animal cruelty in any way, there are actually advantages to this option, making it possibly a more desirable option than a total ban.

5.2 Advantage: An end to bullfighting

The bullfighting industry has been in decline for years, so it is possible that in the near future the sport may come to an end on its own. Since the 1970s, bullfighting has been consistently losing spectators every year. Its decline in popularity could be due to a number of factors, including a growing compassion toward animals or the new forms of mass entertainment, such as television and soccer matches. Before the ban, Catalonia’s largest bullring barely filled a third of its seats, the majority being tourists (Murado). The recession in Spain has had a huge impact on bullfights. The number of bullfights has fallen annually by 60% since 2007, while some mayors have withdrawn subsidies mainly due to budget cuts. Small-town bullfights are coming to an end as town budgets are cut due to declining tax revenue. Town councils are forced to choose between funding social programs, education, and road repairs, or funding bullfights. In this case, they tend to discontinue funding to bullfights, as “bullfights…have become a luxury when cuts must be made” (“Can Spanish Bullfighting Survive Bans, Economy?” 2010). Luis Miguel Ballesteros, a bullfighting promoter, put on 28 small town bullfights in 2008 across the northwestern region of Spain, but by 2010 he only put on 9 shows. He was not receiving the €35,000 subsidy payments Spain used to lend him (“Can Spanish Bullfighting Survive Bans, Economy?” 2010). Just 15 years ago, there were twice as
many matadors. Those for and against bullfighting alike have predicted its demise for at least the past 100 years. Youth unemployment was at 45% in 2010 and that number has continued to rise since, and bullfighting tickets remain more expensive than those for a soccer match. This is one of the reasons why a majority of crowds attending bullfights are middle-aged or older. Therefore, when this generation stops attending bullfights, the crowds will diminish significantly (Courtauld).

Even without an immediate ban imposed by the Spanish court, the political party Podemos (“We Can”) is fighting to bring an end to the sport, and this group is gaining popularity in Spain. In March of 2014 Podemos registered as the third official party of Spain and by May of that year it won a shocking 8% of the vote in the European elections in Spain. The party’s platform states that it is working to achieve prohibition on tauromachy, or bullfighting (Badcock, “Is Spanish Bullfighting on Its Way Out?”). While Podemos appeals to a young, urban voter, the electoral strongholds of the two dominant parties, the conservative Popular Party (PP) and the Socialists (PSOE), are of a more rural, older demographic (Hedgecoe). This fact alone explains why no action has been taken thus far to end bullfighting. Podemos holds a pledge on animal rights which promises the “eradication of the use of public funds for activities harmful to animals” (Badcock, “Is Spanish Bullfighting on Its Way Out?”). Therefore, instead of attempting to impose a ban, the group may aim to eliminate public funds for bullfighting, forcing bullfighting to come to an end on its own. After all, without subsidies, bullfighting would have died out already. In 2013, Spain’s conservative-dominated parliament voted to attach “national cultural interest” status to bullfighting, increasing the sector’s financial support. With groups like Podemos fighting against bullfighting, Spain may see an end to the sport without having to impose a ban through the constitutional court.
5.3 Disadvantage: High quality fights

Bullfighting in small towns is clearly coming to an end, but it seems as though fights in larger cities will remain popular. With the decrease in small town fights, the larger fights held in populous cities are simply becoming higher quality. “Now Spain’s economic woes are bringing the industry back into equilibrium, with fewer but more star-studded fights and breeders also trying harder to turn out only top-quality beasts” (“Can Spanish Bullfighting Survive Bans, Economy?” 2010). In 2010, during the huge “feria,” or fair, in Seville, 13,000 people bought tickets, causing the fight to sell out several days before the event. Matadors from other countries are even coming to Spain, such as the new star fighter named Andres Roca Rey who is a 21 year old from Peru (see Figure 10). While bullfighting schools are closing and matadors are losing their jobs in smaller Spanish towns, larger cities are still thriving and will pull in matadors from other countries to keep the business alive.

5.4 Comparison: Ban versus no ban

As listed in section 3.2, the main advantages to a ban on bullfighting are a decline in animal cruelty, decreased tension between Catalonia and Spain, and the relocation of subsidies to other more pressing social justice issues. Thus, if Spain took no action against bullfighting, all these issues would continue to provoke conflict. A ban on bullfighting would eliminate cruelty to bulls across the nation of Spain, significantly decreasing animal cruelty in Spain in general. This would satisfy animal welfare organizations and appease their protests. Without a ban, Spain
would continue to face massive protests constantly breaking out in cities all around the country. As seen in Figure 11, in September of 2016 a huge protest occurred in Madrid, the capital of Spain. The animal rights political party Pacma, which organized the demonstration, said it was “the biggest anti-bullfighting protest to date” with thousands attending (Kennedy). Protester Chelo Martin Pozo says, “Bullfights are a national shame and if they represent me, then I am not Spanish” (Kennedy). A ban would also mollify tensions between Catalonia and Spain, as

Catalonia would have increased respect for Spain if the country made an effort to show they accept Catalonia’s values. Additionally, while a ban on bullfighting could potentially lead to a loss of up to 200,000 jobs, if Spain did not impose a ban, this would allow these Spaniards to keep their jobs (Fitzpatrick). The Spanish economy is still facing a recession, so it is difficult to consider the effects of a loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs at this time. Finally, because heavy subsidies are put toward bullfighting, these subsidies would instead be put toward more urgent social justice issues, as explained in section 3.2c. Clearly, if Spain takes no action against bullfighting, there will be increased animal cruelty, continued conflict with Catalonia, and even more subsidies will continue to be put toward this sport. However, Spaniards working in the bullfighting industry will be able to keep their jobs. Regardless, bullfighting is coming to an end in small towns while maintaining its popularity in more populous cities.
5.5 Feasibility

The idea of Spain taking no action against bullfighting is realistically the most feasible. Spain’s southern region is generally pro-bullfighting while the north is against the sport. These two harshly conflicting views will make it difficult for Spain to enact a total ban, so Spain will likely take no action against bullfighting in the near future. Still, it is clear that something needs to be done about the sport. Given that a total ban is not feasible at this time (see section 3.5), perhaps it is more realistic to expect Spain to take smaller steps. While Spain as a whole may not take action against bullfighting, individual regions of Spain are speaking out against the sport. Catalonia held a ban for four years, and although it was overturned by the Spanish court, it seems it is most realistic to expect other autonomous communities to begin imposing bans individually. Additionally, if Spain recognizes that bullfighting is a problem yet popularity is decreasing every year, the country may not see a reason to impose a ban. It is likely that the sport will eventually die out on its own, especially with groups like Podemos fighting to eliminate public funds for bullfighting (see section 4.2).

6. Recommendations

After examining two policy options to address the problems brought on by bullfighting, the best option will be to let bullfighting die out on its own without a nationwide ban. Thus, the second option proposed in section 4 is not only the most feasible but also the best option to ensure as many benefits as possible for Spain in the long term. Although a ban on bullfighting would bring immediate advantages such as a decline in animal cruelty and the relocation of subsidies to urgent social justice issues, if Spain does not ban bullfighting these advantages will eventually transpire. Bullfighting is on the decline and will eventually die out, bringing about the
same advantages that would occur with a total ban and avoiding the disadvantages. A total ban is also realistically not feasible in the near future. Although most Spaniards have no interest in bullfighting, they also have no desire to ban it. While 42% of Spaniards claim to support the idea of a ban, this is still a minority (Badcock, “Will Spain ever ban bullfighting?”). Therefore, the nation would not have the support necessary to enact a total ban.

If Spain takes no action against bullfighting, the main problem this poses is the amount of time necessary for the sport to die out on its own. Spain could see decades more of the sport before it becomes a rarity in the country. This could mean while Spain waits for the demise of bullfighting, hundreds of thousands of bulls continue to be killed annually; millions of Spain’s Euros are put toward the sport rather than fueling employment and fighting poverty; and the sport itself continues to incite controversy and split the population. Thus, rather than completely relying on either policy proposed, the best solution would be a combination of the two. Spain must not enact a total ban, but instead, individual provinces should ban the sport if a majority of that province’s population is against it. If the region of Catalonia has a majority vote against bullfighting, Spain should allow Catalonia to enact a ban. If a smaller region such as Asturias votes for a ban, or a more populous region such as Castile and León votes for a ban, the nation should allow this ban. Thus, bullfighting will slowly dwindle throughout the nation.
However, it is important for animal welfare organizations and other anti-bullfighting groups to continue to fight against bullfighting in order to decrease popularity and subsequently impel provinces of Spain to ban the sport. Bullfighting is one of the major issues at the forefront of many animal welfare organizations’ agendas. In July of 2017, a demonstration organized by PETA and the Spanish group AnimalNaturalis took place in Pamplona, Spain. Dozens of half-naked people stood in the main square covered in red paint while wearing bull horns, as shown in Figure 12 (Holmes). It is clear the Spanish government will not enact a total ban, but these protests are still effective. They provoke curiosity in Spaniards, leading these people to further inform themselves on the issues bullfighting brings to Spain. As a result, the demonstrations influence Spaniards to be politically active in the fight against bullfighting. If these protests continue to grow, support for bullfighting will drop further in the coming years, driving individual provinces to impose bans.

7. Conclusion

The tradition of bullfighting became so wildly popular in Spain that today it is viewed as quintessentially Spanish; most people associate the words “bullfighting” and “Spain” without hesitation. However, bullfighting is actually legal in eight countries throughout Europe and Latin America, and it is practiced in even more countries. In the United States, bloodless bullfights are legal in California if held for religious reasons. Still, the bull is usually sent to a slaughterhouse after a fight (Velez). A form of bull running is also legal in India, where bulls are released into a
crowd, forcing the bulls to fend off people trying to ride them (Jallikattu). Bullfighting can be found all over the world, but it brings controversy along with it, causing conflict and chaos.

One situation that brought lots of controversy was Spain’s decision to overturn Catalonia’s ban on bullfighting. Catalonia, a northeastern region of Spain, successfully banned bullfighting in 2012, but Spain overturned the ban in 2016, claiming it was unconstitutional and a matter to be handled only by the central government. Catalonia has been making serious attempts to separate from Spain as of recently, so this ban was seen by many as simply another effort to gain independence (Badcock, “Catalan Bullfights”). After Spain overturned the ban, thousands of Catalans participated in protests to demand an end to bullfighting. Still, Spain refuses to allow a ban on bullfighting in any region of the country (Burgen).

Bullfighting is a huge problem in the country of Spain, partially because of the animal cruelty it involves. Six bulls are killed in every bullfight, meaning that thousands of bulls are killed every year in Spain for public entertainment (“Bullfighting” PETA). Overall, about 250,000 bulls die worldwide per year (“Bullfighting” Humane Society International). The bullfight is not a legitimate, fair fight of man versus beast, as the bull dies in every round. Bulls are made less dangerous before a fight through injections, overfeeding, and shaved horns. During a fight, the matador and his assistants aim to torture the bull for twenty minutes while the crowd cheers. The men stab the animal with long darts, ensuring maximum blood loss. Finally, the matador stabs a sword through the bull’s back into the heart in order to kill the animal. (“Bullfighting: A Tradition of Tragedy,” PETA). Bullfighting presents a unique kind of animal cruelty which is undeniably gruesome, yet it is open to the public and encouraged by the Spanish government.
Another problem presented by bullfighting is the business side of the sport. Because it is big business, it plays a role as such in both Spain and the EU’s economy. Most cities throughout Spain subsidize bullfighting, but within the past decade smaller towns have discontinued funding due to declining tax revenue. While bullfighting no longer occurs in these smaller towns, larger cities are still thriving off big bullfights even though the country is experiencing 20 percent unemployment and extreme debt. This money could be put toward employment, building infrastructure, reducing debt, or helping those living in poverty, but instead this funding goes toward bullfighting (“Can Spanish Bullfighting Survive Bans, Economy?” 2010). To make matters worse, Spain receives 7.5 billion Euros from the EU every year, and it puts 130 million Euros toward bullfighting per year (“Reality Check,” 2016). Without these subsidies, bullfighting may not exist today (Badcock, “EU Cuts Subsidies”).

A final problem resulting from bullfighting is the controversy it incites in Spanish identity. Many Spaniards support the sport, claiming it is part of the Spanish culture and identity. Millions of tourists attend bullfights every year with the mentality that bullfighting is quintessentially Spanish. However, in 2002 it was found that 70% of Spaniards had no interest in bullfighting (Bailey 24). Popularity among Spaniards has consistently dropped every year, proving that the industry has only stayed alive through tourists. Spain is one of the most progressive nations of Europe; thus, a blood sport like bullfighting seems outdated. The sport still exists today solely through tourists and their dollars (Brandes 789).

This paper has proposed two policy options aimed at dealing with the animal rights, social justice, and national identity issues prevalent in Spain as a result of bullfighting. People all around the world, including citizens of the EU, United States, and Latin America are affected by this blood sport. The first policy this paper introduces is a total ban on bullfighting throughout
the country of Spain. This policy is advantageous because it would lead to a significant drop in cruelty to bulls in Spain. If Spain banned bullfighting, other countries around the world may be encouraged to do so as well, meaning that animal cruelty all around the world would decrease. It would also help to unite Catalonia and Spain. Catalonia would appreciate Spain’s effort to share its progressive values, thus settling tensions between the two. A total ban would also mean that the subsidies Spain puts toward bullfighting would instead go toward other, more urgent issues, hopefully helping Spaniards in some way. Still, a total ban poses a variety of disadvantages, such as a loss in jobs, more conflict from pro-bullfighting lobbyers, and a hit to the economy. This paper then concludes that a total ban is not feasible in the near future, but a partial ban in a province of Spain would be more realistic.

The second option proposed is an analysis of Spain’s future if bullfighting continues to be legal. In this case, bullfighting may actually still come to an end even without a ban, as the industry has been in decline for years. However, while bullfighting in small towns is coming to an end, fights in larger cities are remaining popular. This policy option is more feasible than a total ban, but it is clear something needs to be done about the sport. Individual regions of Spain have been speaking out about bullfighting, so it is most realistic to expect Catalonia to attempt a ban for the second time along with other autonomous communities. Therefore, Spain itself will likely take no action against bullfighting, but individual provinces will attempt to impose bans, especially with animal welfare and political groups fighting to bring an end to the sport.


Oblaré Román, Rocío. Personal Interview. 03 December 2017.


**Figures:**

“Andres Roca Rey.” *Pinterest*, www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/561050066060046118/.


