# Spain's blackout exposes urgent need for grid-stabilising battery storage



Last week, Spain's power grid underwent a catastrophic failure, resulting in a blackout that affected the entire country and parts of Portugal. This event underscored the critical need for grid stability, specifically in maintaining a stable frequency — the essential rhythm of the electrical system that ensures power reliably flows from generation sources to homes and businesses. The episode has prompted urgent discussions among grid operators and policymakers regarding the integration of energy storage solutions, particularly batteries, to prevent similar incidents in the future.

The frequency of the grid, traditionally maintained by the spinning of turbines in thermal plants powered by fossil fuels or nuclear energy, operates on strict thresholds — 50 hertz in Europe. Deviations beyond 0.2 hertz can induce instability, and a catastrophic failure, like that witnessed in Spain, typically occurs with deviations as small as 0.5. Investigations are underway to dissect the reasons behind this failure, notably the loss of 2,200 MW from generating units shortly before the blackout, which was preceded by energy oscillations on the European grid.

The incident has reinvigorated debate about Spain's energy policies, especially the contemplated phasing out of nuclear power in favour of renewable sources. Critics argue that with renewables making up approximately 70% of the grid's power prior to the blackout, the fragility of such an energy mix is precarious in the absence of sufficient stabilising technologies. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has reiterated his commitment to renewable energy, acknowledging the evident need for grid improvements, including the integration of storage technologies to bolster stability.

Portugal's response to the blackout included suspending power imports from Spain, a decision that triggered an immediate spike in electricity prices across the country, highlighting the interconnectedness of the Iberian power markets and the cascading effects that one nation’s grid failures can have on another.

As countries look towards a future dominated by renewable energy, the role of batteries is becoming increasingly central. These systems do not have the latency issues inherent to gas plants; they can rapidly respond to frequency changes by either deploying stored energy or absorbing excess generation. According to Arushi Sharma Frank from the Center for Strategic & International Studies, "Batteries instantaneously correct frequency," accentuating their capability in delivering what is known as synthetic inertia.

Globally, the installation of energy storage systems has accelerated rapidly. In Texas, more than half the ancillary services used for grid stability come from battery installations, which have been essential in managing the state's varied energy resources. Conversely, Spain currently lags behind, with only one gigawatt of battery capacity against 64 gigawatts of solar installed, indicating a pressing need for investment in energy storage projects.

Other innovative solutions are emerging to bolster grid stability. Highview Power’s liquid air energy storage technology, for example, can store energy for up to six hours, while Siemens is developing transient storage facilities in Germany that employ supercapacitors capable of managing power fluctuations with unprecedented speed. Residential battery systems, such as those managed by Sunrun Inc. in Puerto Rico, where home batteries contribute back to the grid, exemplify the versatility of energy storage options available today.

Furthermore, advancements in software technologies are enhancing grid operators’ ability to respond to frequency variations. Companies such as Hybrid Energy Storage Solutions in Spain utilise algorithms that can quickly manage inertia and other stabilising functions. These innovations are critical as grid complexity increases alongside the growth of renewable energy sources.

In the UK, proactive measures taken in response to a 2019 blackout have positioned the country as a leader in developing mechanisms to ensure grid stability. The Stability Pathfinder initiative represents the world's first program to procure grid inertia from non-traditional sources. Quinbrook Infrastructure Partners is also focusing on traditional stabilising technologies, such as synchronous condensers, to fortify the UK grid.

As Spain grapples with the aftermath of this blackout, the European Commission has called for a measured analysis, cautioning against hasty conclusions that blame renewable sources for the instability. Teresa Ribera, the Vice President of the European Commission, emphasised the importance of energy storage solutions in bolstering system reliability, indicating a shared understanding that innovation and resilient infrastructure are essential for a sustainable energy future.

Ultimately, the recent blackout serves as a stark warning of the challenges faced by increasingly renewable-heavy grids and the urgent need for robust solutions to maintain stability in what is bound to be an electric future. The lessons from Spain should prompt quicker implementation of energy storage technologies and a reevaluation of energy policies to ensure reliability, both for the Iberian Peninsula and beyond.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 3, 5-7
2. Paragraph 2
3. Paragraph 4
4. Paragraph 5
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7. Paragraph 9

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.energyconnects.com/news/utilities/2025/may/spain-blackout-shows-need-for-batteries-in-renewable-heavy-world/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/3875c630-215b-490b-a0a8-c6bcf3cfedc6> - Following a major grid failure that caused a blackout across the Iberian Peninsula, Portugal suspended power imports from Spain. This led to a sharp rise in Portuguese electricity prices, highlighting the interconnectedness of the two countries' power grids and the impact of such outages on regional energy markets.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/c62fbb73e982365d10402323e4fcfcc6> - A massive power outage on April 28 across the Iberian Peninsula has sparked debate in Spain regarding the country's plan to phase out nuclear energy in favor of renewables. Critics argue that the outage highlights the instability of renewable energy sources like wind and solar, which accounted for around 70% of the grid’s power before the blackout.
4. <https://elpais.com/economia/2025-05-09/las-redes-electricas-sufrieron-dos-oscilaciones-energeticas-unos-30-minutos-antes-del-gran-apagon-en-la-peninsula.html> - On April 28, 2025, a major blackout affected the Iberian Peninsula, preceded by two energy oscillations in the European continental electrical grid. These oscillations, recorded between 12:03 and 12:21, were followed by a loss of 2,200 MW due to generation trips in southern Spain, leading to the collapse of the Iberian system.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/6b35b57d-d84f-4d79-b247-5c40da60cbe9> - Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez affirmed his unwavering support for renewable energy despite a massive power outage that recently disrupted Spain's electricity supply. He emphasized that the blackout would not deter the government's green energy plans and acknowledged the need for grid improvements and the integration of stabilizing technologies for renewables.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/eus-ribera-urges-against-hasty-conclusions-iberia-blackout-2025-05-05/> - European Commission Vice President Teresa Ribera emphasized the need for a calm and thorough analysis of the recent blackout in Spain and Portugal before drawing conclusions. She warned against prematurely blaming renewable energy sources and highlighted the importance of energy storage solutions to enhance the reliability of the power system.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/5a28e93f23e24c77c60749d5db397105> - A coordinated theft of copper cables disrupted Spain's high-speed rail services, affecting thousands of passengers. The cables, integral to the signaling systems, were stolen at five locations along the rail line in Toledo, impacting routes to southern cities like Seville, Malaga, and Granada. The theft caused significant delays and confusion at Madrid’s Atocha station.