

The Emotional Dimension of the Catalan Independentist Referendum in 2017

José Manuel Rivera Otero , Erika Jaráiz Gulías , and Paloma Castro Martínez 

Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Correspondence: Paloma Castro Martínez (paloma.castro2@usc.es)

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Abstract

In this article, we examined the emotional regime emerging in Catalonia as a result of the 1st of October 2017 independence referendum and determined the effect of emotions and cleavages, among others, on the decision to vote in this referendum. The emotional regime, which involves the articulation of normative emotions and dominant practices in political mobilisation, is interrelated with affective polarisation. Indeed, for this phenomenon to occur the presence of positive emotions towards the ingroup and negative emotions towards the outgroup is necessary. In Catalonia, the formation of both groups—pro-independence and non-independence—is the result of the evolution of the Catalan nationalist cleavage. We used four surveys carried out by the Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas of the University of Santiago de Compostela (EIP-USC) and advanced statistical techniques. Our analysis reveals that, after the referendum, there was an increase in positive emotional presence towards pro-independence actors, which decreased as the Catalan independence process—the *procés*—progressed. We have found that, although the variable with the greatest effect in voting decision at the referendum was party identification, emotions towards leaders and parties and the Catalan nationalist cleavage greatly influenced this decision.

Keywords

Catalonia; emotions; independence; nationalism; referendum

1. Introduction

Throughout history, referendums have been one of the most widely used resources to try to achieve the secessionist aspirations of some territories considered stateless nations (Keating, 1997, 2021). Many independence processes end up resorting to referendums as a mechanism of direct democracy capable of

legitimizing their aspirations (Willner-Reid, 2018). Although the logic behind referendums is that it is citizens who give legitimacy to secessionist aspirations, the truth is that, due to their generally consultative nature, the only thing referendums do is confirm what their political representatives had previously decided (Moreno, 2020). This linkage of secessionist referendum outcomes to partisan interests is due to the fact that political leaders and parties influence voters' perceptions, even to the point of generating new identities. Therefore, understanding the voting decision process proves to be a crucial objective.

While there is a large literature on electoral voting behaviour, there is little theory on how voters behave in direct democracy (Hobolt, 2006). A priori, one might think that the factors that lead voters to vote in a referendum are related to the idiosyncrasies of such an exceptional event. But the fact that leaders or political parties do not appear on referendum ballots does not imply that their influence is irrelevant to the results. It could be the voters' own political predispositions, such as their partisan identification or their emotions towards the political elites, that underpin their decision to vote for or against independence. However, until recently, emotional links with group identity or political elites seemed to be the great forgotten in the study of political behaviour. A component that cannot be neglected given that politics seems to be increasingly emotional by the presence of emotions in both the speeches of political leaders and the political content of the media, intensifying the perception that we are facing the "age of emotion" (Moss et al., 2020).

Referendums have been used in some of the best-known cases of the so-called peripheral nationalism, such as Catalonia, Quebec, and Scotland (Giori, 2017). However, in none of the three cases, for different reasons, has this mechanism resulted in the desired objective: the separation of the territories from their respective states. What differentiates the Catalan referendum from the previous ones is that the referendums held in Quebec and Scotland had the approval of the government of Canada and the United Kingdom, which facilitated their implementation and the validity of their results. This was not the case in Catalonia, where the referendum was illegal.

In contrast to studies on the Catalan independence process and its evolution over the last 15 years (della Porta et al., 2019; Muñoz & Guinjoan, 2013; Rivera et al., 2016; Serrano, 2013) that pay attention to aspects such as the roots of the conflict, the demands for independence, and the resources and strategies of the governments and elites involved, our research tries to determine the emotional regime of the Catalan citizenship around the Catalan independence process, the so-called "*procés*," in general and the referendum in particular, in order to subsequently identify how these emotions, among others, explain the vote in favour of the independence of Catalonia at the illegal plebiscite held in 2017. The emotional regime, which involves the articulation of normative emotions and dominant practices in political mobilisation (Reddy, 2001), is interrelated with affective polarisation, since the presence of positive emotions towards the ingroup and negative emotions towards the outgroup is necessary to this phenomenon. In Catalonia, the formation of both groups—pro-independence and non-independence—is related to the evolution of the Catalan nationalist cleavage.

To achieve its objectives, this article first presents the theoretical framework explaining the concept of emotional regime and its relationship with cleavages and the main contributions of the literature on voting in self-determination referendums from an emotional perspective, from which our research hypotheses emerge. This is followed by the context necessary to understand the origin of the Catalan *procés* until its culmination: the referendum on Catalan independence, and its subsequent evolution until the 2023 regional

elections, which mark the end of the *procés*. After explaining the methodology and the data, we present the results of the descriptive analysis that allowed us to observe the configuration of the emotional regime, followed by the regression model that explains the decision to vote in the referendum. Finally, we present the conclusions of our analysis and the contributions of our research to the study of voting behaviour in self-determination referendums.

2. Theoretical Framework

The specialized literature analyses independence referendums from three main perspectives: (a) the analysis of their origin and who calls them, and therefore their legality, which is a recurrent subject of academic disagreement; (b) the referendum as a form of expression of the demands of the social movements that drive them (della Porta et al., 2019), reflecting a strong nationalist sentiment rooted in society; and (c) the referendum as a technical/strategic mechanism used by the elites to achieve their objectives (Colomer, 2018). Thus, although the referendums in Quebec (Clarke et al., 2004; Nadeau et al., 1999) and Scotland (Liñeira & Henderson, 2019; Liñeira et al., 2017), as well as the relationship between Brexit secessionist dynamics and vote orientation (Clarke et al., 2017; Hobolt et al., 2021; Vasilopoulou & Wagner, 2020), have been extensively studied, there are still few studies from a political behaviour perspective, and even fewer that have approached electoral analysis from an emotional perspective (Brouard et al., 2021; Clarke et al., 2017; Garry, 2013).

While there is a large literature on behaviour in ordinary elections, there are still not many contributions on how voters behave in direct democracy (Hobolt, 2006; LeDuc, 2002). However, the study of voting behaviour in self-determination referendums is of special interest given the exceptional nature of such events, which makes them salient issues (Brouard et al., 2021). In response to dramatic events, such as wars or man-made disasters, or politically designed events, such as referendums, where individuals are forced to position themselves, new identities emerge or crystallize (Hobolt et al., 2021). Referendums are then about positional issues (Vasilopoulou & Wagner, 2020) which, in the case of Catalonia, implies the division of the political elite and, consequently, of the citizenry, into two new identities: pro-independence and non-independence. Indeed, the hegemony of the “*procés*” as master frame has been such that it has led to the forced positioning of all political actors—although this division is nothing more than the product of the evolution of another cleavage that traditionally, along with ideology, has articulated partisan competition in Catalonia: Catalan nationalism (Cazorla & Rivera, 2016). Therefore, relying on these two axes of competition, the ideological and the identitarian, we formulate our first hypothesis:

H1: The Catalan nationalist cleavage is the predominant cleavage shaping voter decision-making at the 2017 referendum.

Although, unlike conventional elections, referendums are exceptional events, partisan identification has also been revealed as one of the explanatory factors of voting decision (Brouard et al., 2021; Clarke et al., 2004; Liñeira & Henderson, 2019). However, in this type of consultations, when independence is the issue and party systems tend to be structured according to the identity cleavage, partisan identification reflects preferences for independence. This cognitive shortcut would allow voters to behave according to their party’s narrative, relying more on the positioning of the organization than on their own reflections about independence (Garry, 2013; Hobolt, 2006). From this argument derives our second hypothesis:

H2: Partisan identification with pro-independence parties is the most important component in the pro-independence vote.

Not forgetting that Campbell et al. (1960) in their seminal research define partisan identification as “individual affective orientation towards an important object or group in their environment” (p. 121), so this concept is based on an emotional component. The importance of affects and emotions in political decision-making, and their influence on our cognitive perceptions, has led to multiple more or less empirical investigations, which start from the notion that explanations of political action based exclusively on cognitive elements are only partial explanations (Redlawsk, 2006).

This emotional revival has also reached the study of referendums, several of them linked to the social identity approach (Abrams et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2017; Hobolt et al., 2021; Tajfel, 1970), on which the idea of affective polarization is based, understood as an emotional attachment to in-group partisans and hostility towards out-group partisans (Green et al., 2004; Iyengar et al., 2012). Tajfel’s (1970) theory refers to the awareness that individuals themselves would have of belonging to certain social groups, together with the emotional significance and value that such membership would have for them (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Supporters of a political formation with high levels of aversion towards other parties feel more incentivized to differentiate themselves from their political opponents, so they will position themselves on issues in accordance with their partisan preferences and away from the positions of those of other parties (Druckman et al., 2021). In addition, when members of a group feel wronged, they employ various strategies to both protect themselves and enhance their identity (Abrams, 2015; Abrams & Hogg, 1988). These strategies include protest actions, especially when that harmful situation is perceived as illegitimate. Injustices activate emotions such as anger (van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Again, issue opinion and partisan identity would be interrelated. And precisely because self-determination referendums entail positioning on identity-related issues, compared to most ordinary elections, independence referendums involve a high emotional engagement of citizens (Liñeira et al., 2017; Nadeau et al., 1999; Vasilopoulou & Wagner, 2020), to the extent that this emotional reaction can generate two differentiated identities, contributing to the increase of affective polarization (Hernández et al., 2021). Following this logic, it is at the time of holding a referendum that we perceive the greatest emotional effervescence, with emotions subsiding as time passes, which leads us to formulate our third hypothesis:

H3: Emotional polarization is highest at the time of holding the independence referendum in 2017, with a higher presence of emotions towards political leaders and parties among Catalans.

However, most referendum research that has incorporated the study of emotions has focused primarily on three emotions at a time: (a) fear, anger, and anxiety (Garry, 2013), with anxious voters relying on substantive EU issues and angry voters relying on second-order elements related to domestic politics when voting in the referendum on the fiscal pact in Ireland; (b) fear, anger, and enthusiasm, with angry Remainers and enthusiastic Leavers changing their party vote after Brexit in line with their positioning towards this issue and even breaking with their partisan identification (Vasilopoulou & Wagner, 2020); or (c) fear, anger, and pride, with anger and pride towards New Caledonia as part of the French territory being the emotions that, respectively, have positive and negative effects on the likelihood of voting for independence (Brouard et al., 2021). A somewhat different proposal is that of Clarke et al. (2017), who took into account eight

emotions, four positive (pride, hope, confidence, and happiness) and four negative (fear, anger, disgust, and uneasiness), that respondents expressed when describing their affections for their country's membership in the EU.

As observed in the work of Clarke et al. (2017), independence referendums, as they are particularly emotive events, rather than arousing only three emotions, may draw an emotional regime in voters. This is a concept inspired by Hochschild's (1979) "feeling rules," social conventions that shape how people express their emotions in different contexts, which refers to the limited sense of the articulation of normative emotions and dominant practices in political mobilization (Hidalgo, 2018; Lagares, Máiz, & Rivera, 2022; Moss et al., 2020; Reddy, 2001). Moreover, it may be argued that the concepts of emotional regime and affective polarization are interrelated, since one of the necessary requirements for affective polarization to occur is the presence of positive emotions towards the ingroup and negative emotions towards the outgroup (Green et al., 2004; Iyengar et al., 2012) or, in other words, the existence of a common emotional regime among members of the same group.

The Catalan independence process, the so-called "*procés*," is the product of a "strategy driven by a politically motivated elite endogenous to the political process of sustained and growing confrontation with the Spanish government" (Colomer, 2018). It is the political elites who command the process leading to the referendum. And it is the political predispositions that act as mediators before the voting decision. However, although instability and progressive polarization have undoubtedly been the keynote of Catalan politics in the last 10 years, the degree of polarization of the political and media narrative could be different from the feelings of citizens (Lagares, Máiz, & Rivera, 2022). This is why the study of the emotional regime of supporters and non-supporters of independence towards the Catalan political parties and elites is of special interest—an analysis that could also serve as an indicator of the level of polarization of Catalan society. Thus, we formulate our fourth hypothesis:

H4: The emotional regime of voters in favour of Catalan independence is articulated on positive emotions towards pro-independence leaders and parties and on negative emotions towards non-independence supporters.

Our interest, however, lies not only in describing the emotional regime of pro- and non-independence voters, but also in identifying which discrete emotions have a significant effect on the voting decision in the Catalan referendum, thus contributing to the literature on the study of voting behaviour in referendums from an emotional perspective. To this end, we formulate our fifth hypothesis:

H5: Positive emotions towards pro-independence leaders and parties have a positive effect on the voting decision in favour of Catalan independence in the 2017 referendum.

3. Context

Catalan nationalism originated in the first half of the 19th century, linked to the exaltation of Catalan culture and language. It was originally regionalist rather than secessionist in nature. The Catalan process, which has transitioned from a regionalist model to secessionist aspirations, has been led by the Catalan political elite (Barrio & Rodríguez-Teruel, 2017; Colomer, 2018; Jaráiz et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2016), which uses the

defence of Catalonia's right to self-determination and popular consultation through a referendum as mechanisms to achieve its objectives. The pursuit of referendums to achieve independence has also been a strategy employed by nationalist political elites in other contexts such as Scotland.

If one had to point to a date that marks the beginning of the *procés*, it would probably be the 28 June 2010, the day the Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional 14 articles, with 27 others being subject to a narrow interpretation by the Court, of the Catalan statute of autonomy approved in 2006 (Caamaño, 2016). Reactions were swift and, on the very day the ruling was published, the then president of the Generalitat of Catalonia, José Montilla (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya [PSC]), encouraged citizens to participate in a demonstration in rejection of the ruling. The demonstration was called by Òmnium Cultural, but it was supported by all the political parties in parliament, except for the Partido Popular (PP) and Ciudadanos (Cs). This mobilisation, in which posters and proclamations in favour of Catalan independence, as well as *Estelada* flags, were already the predominant feature of the day, seemed to be the prelude to the staging of what, from here on, Catalan politics was: the polarisation between pro-independence and non-independence parties, with non-positioned relegated to a secondary role. This polarisation represents the political dimension of the Catalan conflict, marked by changes in the Spanish party system, especially the rise of the extreme right (Vox), as well as the consolidation of Cs and Podemos as decisive parties in the formation of the national government.

Since then, events have followed one after another. Among many others, every 11 September, the *Diada de Catalunya* is celebrated. Although it is called by civil society organisations such as Òmnium Cultural or the Assemblée Nacional Catalana, it has roots in pro-independence political parties. Between 2009 and 2011, more than 500 non-binding municipal consultations on independence took place (Muñoz & Guinjoan, 2013) and in January 2013 the Catalan parliament adopted the Declaration of Sovereignty that affirmed Catalonia as a sovereign political subject, signalling the political will to hold a referendum in the near future, despite the fact that the Constitutional Court also declared it unconstitutional, fuelling the conflict between Catalan and Spanish institutions (Orriols & Rodon, 2016). While awaiting the long-awaited referendum, on 9 November 2014, just over two million Catalans took part in a symbolic and non-binding vote led by extra-parliamentary actors and movements, albeit with the support of the Catalan parliament (della Porta et al., 2019).

Likewise, political parties began their ideological repositioning, from more moderate nationalist positions to openly pro-independence stances, the highest expression of which was the Junts pel Sí (JxSí) coalition, a candidacy for the 2015 Catalan parliamentary elections formed by Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (CDC) and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), as well as Demòcrates de Catalunya and Moviment d'Esquerres. These formations, despite their a priori ideological distancing, justified their union under the objective of Catalan independence, winning elections that had been planned as a plebiscite (Rivera et al., 2016). Although the spatial reconfiguration of political competition began to take shape in 2010, it became clearly two-dimensional in the 2015 regional elections, when the ideological and identity cleavages had an unequal weight, with the former weakening and the latter gaining ground (Lagares et al., 2021; Pereira, 2016; Rivera & Jaráiz, 2016). After these elections, however, disagreements began within the ideological left, which showed its clout within the coalition by vetoing Artur Mas (Martí & Cetrà, 2016).

The reconfiguration of the party system was accompanied by the modification of the increasingly emotionally charged narrative (Feijóo-Vázquez et al., 2023), which evolved over the years, from a positioning

of the elites in favour of the so-called “right to decide,” through the holding of a referendum, to the demand for independence—although, strategically, the right to decide and the demand for independence are intermingled in the pro-independence discourse (Cetrà & Harvey, 2019), which is why some parties even argue that to vote in favour of independence one does not have to be a nationalist (Colomer, 2018).

The fulfilment of the electoral promise came with the approval by the Catalan parliament of the law of rupture with Spain, at the same time that President Artur Mas (Convergència i Unió [CiU]) was disqualified for two years for the 9N consultation, and the Referendum Law, which eventually was suspended by the constitutional court, as well as the law of legal transition approved the following day, which led Mariano Rajoy’s administration to take control of the budget with the Ministry of the Interior taking over the coordination of the security forces in Catalonia, further fuelling the confrontation between the two blocks for and against independence. These judicial decisions represent the legal dimension of the Catalan conflict, which plays a fundamental role in the evolution of events. Moreover, in addition to the political and legal dimensions, a third one should be mentioned: the communicative dimension, which played also an important role in the polarisation process. It was characterised by the strong media campaign of the national media against the pro-Catalan process and specifically against Catalan independence.

Despite the suspension of the law, and at a time of heightened tension between the Catalan and Spanish governments, the referendum for independence was held in Catalonia on the 1st of October 2017. It was called by the pro-independence Catalan parliament and led to a wave of demonstrations both in favour of independence and in defence of the unity of Spain. The referendum asked the following yes/no question: “Do you want Catalonia to be an independent state in the form of a republic?” and according to the Catalan government, 2,262,424 Catalans (43.03%) voted in the referendum, with 90.73% in favour and 7.8% against.

In view of these results, 10 days after the holding of the referendum, the then president of the Generalitat, Carles Puigdemont (JxSi), declared, and then temporarily suspended, the independence of Catalonia. In response, the Spanish government of PP approved the application of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, which meant the suspension of the autonomy of Catalonia and the calling of elections within a maximum period of six months. On 2 June 2018, Quim Torra (Junts per Catalunya [JxCat]) took office as president following the elections of 21 December 2017. At the same time, the entire Catalan government at the time of the referendum, as well as other political and civil society representatives, were charged with the crimes of rebellion, sedition, usurpation of public functions, disobedience, and embezzlement of public funds. Some were imprisoned, and others, like Puigdemont, fled the country. It took about two years for the Supreme Court to sentence the defendants to prison terms of between 9 and 13 years for the crime of sedition, leading to an explosion of demonstrations, protests, and riots in Catalonia. These imprisonments marked the beginning of the break-up of the pro-independence bloc, in which ideological differences had been so far bridged by the nationalist cleavage. Subsequently, after a period in which Torra’s disqualification for refusing to remove a banner from the façade of the Generalitat was on the table, a government crisis arose between JxCat and ERC, anticipating a call for elections that had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The postponement was long enough for Torra to be disqualified and the then Vice-President Pere Aragonés (ERC) to assume the position of acting president, an office he finally took, with the support of JxCat and the Candidatura d’Unitat Popular (CUP) following the elections held on 14 February 2021. These elections meant a narrow victory for the PSC. This victory was consolidated with the subsequent victory of this party in the elections of 2024, and the investiture as president of the Generalitat of Salvador Illa (PSC), thus putting an end to the *procés*.

4. Data and Methodology

This research has two main objectives: (a) to determine the emotional regime that emerged around the Catalan process, both at the time of the referendum on the independence of Catalonia and from a longitudinal perspective, between 2015 and 2022; and (b) to identify the explanatory factors of the vote in favour of independence in the 2017 referendum, paying attention to the role of emotions towards political actors in the voting decision.

To achieve both objectives and test the hypotheses, a quantitative methodology was adopted using a descriptive analysis and constructing an additive multivariate regression model. The logic of the additive model responded to the grouping of many variables in three dimensions. The first refers to the emotional component, differentiating between emotions towards leaders and political parties and sympathy towards the political formations themselves. The emotions included in the model were pride, fear, hope, anxiety, enthusiasm, anger, hatred, contempt, concern, calmness, resentment, bitterness, and disgust, and its use has been successfully tested on numerous occasions in the field of political behaviour (Jaráiz et al., 2020; Marcus, 2013; Marcus et al., 2000). The second dimension corresponds to sociodemographic variables (gender, age, and level of education or employment status) and contextual variables (personal, current, and prospective economic evaluations of Catalonia, and the evaluation of the current and prospective politics in Catalonia and Spain). Finally, the third dimension corresponds to political attitudes: ideological and nationalist self-placements.

In all the surveys used in this research, for the measurement of emotions, we asked about a total of 13 emotions, 12 of which correspond to the orthogonal full set solution proposed by the American National Election Studies 1995 pilot study (Marcus et al., 2000), to which calmness was added. The measurement of the thirteen emotions was done through three questions: (a) presence of the emotion (whether or not the respondent has ever felt an emotion); (b) intensity of the emotion felt on a scale from 1 (*low intensity*) to 5 (*high intensity*); and (c) duration of the emotional expression (whether the respondent continues to feel the emotion; for more information see Jaráiz et al., 2020). For the purpose of this study, however, only emotional presence was used. Likewise, in the four surveys, sympathy was the variable through which partisan identification was measured. This variable corresponds to the question: "In any case, which is the party for which you feel more sympathy or is closer to your ideas?" the answer being totally spontaneous (for more information see Lagares, Pereira & Jaráiz, 2022).

The proposed statistical analysis was possible thanks to the use of four surveys carried out by the Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas of the University of Santiago de Compostela (EIP-USC) at four different points in time: the first three are post-electoral surveys of the autonomous elections in Catalonia in 2015 (EPEAC 2015; carried out between 16 November and 23 December), 2018 (EPEAC 2018; from 15 May to 15 July), and 2021 (EPEAC, 2021; carried out between 17 March and 28 April), with a sample of 1,400 in the first case and 1,000 in the other two; and the fourth was carried out in 2022 (EPECC 2022; 11–21 October) with a sample of 400 individuals. The four surveys were carried out according to a random selection sampling with a proportional allocation with quotas by sex, age, and province, and under the worst-case scenario $p = q$ with a confidence level of 95% (2 sigmas) and an associated error of $\pm 2.62\%$ for the 2015 survey, $\pm 3.16\%$ for the 2018 and 2021 surveys, and $\pm 5.00\%$ for the 2022 survey.

5. Analysis

The descriptive analysis shows that, coinciding with the holding of the referendum on the independence of Catalonia, it was in 2018 that the percentage of those who preferred independence from the Spanish state as a territorial political solution reached the highest point (34.2%; Table 1). Likewise, the percentage of those who preferred Catalonia to remain within a federal state that recognises Catalonia as a nation also increased (17.2%). At the height of the “pro-Catalonia” *procés*, citizens’ preferences concentrated on the most “extreme” solutions, especially the secession of Catalonia from the Spanish state, a solution advocated by the pro-independence political elites. However, after the failed referendum and the beginning of the end of the *procés*, citizens’ preferences shifted and leaned towards more feasible solutions, mainly the permanence of Catalonia within the State of the Autonomies, which in 2022 amounted to 51.5%, with special relevance given to the achievement of a more favourable fiscal status.

In line with the previous data, the response to the Moreno-Linz question (Table 2) shows that the percentage of citizens who say they feel both Spanish and Catalan fell 5 percentage points in 2018 compared to 2015, rising to over 40% in 2021 and reaching 46% in 2022. The opposite trend is shown by the options “more Catalan than Spanish” and “only Catalan,” which reached the highest percentages in 2018, with 56.6% of Catalans falling into these options.

Table 1. The most appropriate political-territorial solution for Catalonia (%).

	2015	2018	2021	2022
Its independence from the Spanish state	29.4	34.2	30.4	20.5
Its permanence within the State of the Autonomies	16.3	11.2	16.7	23.6
Its permanence within a Spanish federal state	17.5	10.1	8.6	10.5
Its permanence within a federal state that recognises Catalonia as a nation	7.7	17.2	8.6	12.6
Its permanence within the State of Autonomies, but with greater powers	10.6	8.4	7.5	7.4
Its permanence within the State of Autonomies, but with a fiscal status comparable to that of the Basque Country and Navarre	11.0	11.1	13.5	20.5
Its permanence within a centralised state	2.7	5.0	6.7	2.8
Unanswered	4.8	2.8	8.0	2.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas (2015, 2018, 2021, 2022).

Table 2. Nationalist sentiment (%).

	2015	2018	2021	2022
Spanish only	6.8	4.7	4.7	7.3
More Spanish than Catalan	6.0	4.2	3.7	4.0
As Spanish as Catalan	38.3	32.7	41.1	46.0
More Catalan than Spanish	26.0	31.2	28.4	25.7
Catalan only	21.8	25.4	19.8	14.5
Unanswered	1.1	1.8	2.2	2.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas (2015, 2018, 2021, 2022).

According to the survey data, if we compare the data from the Moreno-Linz question with the position in favour or against the independence process, quite similar results are obtained. Thus, in 2015, 47.8% of respondents felt more Catalan than Spanish or only Catalan, while the percentage of those in favour of the pro-independence process was close to 50%; while in 2018, shortly after the referendum of the 1st of October, the percentage of individuals who feel more Catalan than Spanish or only Catalan rose to 56.6%, while the percentage of those who supported the pro-independence process was 54.0%. Subsequently, from 2021 onwards, as mentioned above, *Catalanist* sentiment declined, as did pro-independence sentiment, a figure that in 2021 was still 47.3%, but dropped to 36.6% in 2022.

According to the survey data, 69.1% of respondents took part in the referendum, and, of these, 79.5% voted in favour compared to 11.2% who voted against. With no relevant differences by sex in the level of participation, it was citizens aged between 30 and 49 (36.1%) that voted in favour of independence to the greatest extent, followed by older age groups (25.0% of pro-independence voters were aged between 50 and 64 years and another 25.0% over 65), with the youngest, under 29, being the least numerous group among pro-independence voters. Likewise, in general terms, the higher the level of education, the higher the percentage of individuals who voted in favour of independence, with the group of citizens with higher education accounting for 33.4% of pro-independence voters.

With regard to the political profile of voters in favour of Catalan independence, in 2012, 36.7% voted for ERC and 23.7% for CiU, while in 2015, when ERC and CDC ran on the same ticket, 68.0% chose to support JxSí. In 2018, the year following the referendum and the dissolution of the coalition, 42.1% voted for ERC and 37.1% for JxCat, with 49.0% and 21.0% sympathy for both political formations, respectively. Similarly, the leaders of both political organisations were the best rated by voters in favour of Catalan independence, with high average ratings for Junqueras (8.31) and Puigdemont (8.04), and a rating of 7.22 for Quim Torra. Finally, this recurrent and high percentage of support for ERC was reflected in the ideological self-placement of voters, which stood at 3.32, while the nationalist self-placement reached an average rating of 7.63.

In the area of emotions (Table 3), and in line with the high ratings of the pro-independence leaders, over 70% of pro-independence voters felt pride towards Junqueras and Puigdemont, as well as hope in both leaders, in addition to Torra, while around 50% felt enthusiasm and calm towards the three pro-independence leaders mentioned. These four positive emotions were present, although to a lesser extent in the case of the CUP leader. In contrast, voters in favour of Catalan independence felt negative emotions towards the leaders who clearly positioned themselves against the referendum and in favour of the unity of Spain: Arrimadas and Albiol. Among these emotions, however, the most prevalent were anger and concern, especially towards the Cs candidate. Meanwhile, voters against Catalan independence felt hope in the leaders who showed more moderate positions and advocated intermediate solutions: Iceta and Domènech. At the same time, they also felt anger and concern towards the pro-independence leaders, although these two emotions also extended to the leader of PP.

These data were repeated for the political parties (Table 4). In the case of voters in favour of Catalan independence, however, the presence of pride towards the parties was lower in percentage terms than towards the pro-independence leaders, although the presence of hope was particularly high in the case of ERC (74.2%). With regard to negative emotions, in addition to anger and concern towards the parties that defend the unity of Spain, the presence of fear towards Cs stood out (41.6%).

Table 3. Comparison of voters' emotions towards political leaders in the 1st of October referendum (%).

	In favour								Against							
	Torra	Puigdm	Junq	Riera	Dom	Iceta	Arrim	Albiol	Torra	Puigdm	Junq	Riera	Dom	Iceta	Arrim	Albiol
Pride	54.4	71.8	72.9	32.9	13.0	4.3	0.5	0.3	6.3	14.0	21.7	2.4	16.7	18.8	14.6	4.6
Fear	1.8	3.4	1.8	4.2	0.3	3.8	36.6	26.1	23.4	17.2	6.5	16.7	5.0	2.4	10.1	15.9
Hope	74.5	74.5	77.5	45.2	28.0	9.8	0.9	0.2	12.5	10.8	28.3	4.8	33.3	44.7	36.4	9.1
Anxiety	6.1	6.2	5.1	2.8	1.4	5.4	27.3	19.1	17.2	18.3	10.9	14.3	0.0	2.4	4.5	13.6
Enthusiasm	53.3	59.9	57.7	32.1	11.3	2.8	0.6	0.6	6.3	9.7	20.7	2.4	15.0	21.2	19.3	5.7
Anger	6.5	9.6	4.3	7.4	5.4	24.2	63.6	55.7	43.8	54.8	25.0	21.4	5.0	3.5	21.3	38.6
Hatred	0.6	0.4	0.0	1.2	0.3	3.2	18.9	16.5	6.3	3.2	1.1	0.0	1.7	1.2	2.2	4.5
Contempt	1.0	0.7	0.3	1.8	1.6	7.5	39.7	37.0	15.6	16.1	3.3	4.8	0.0	4.7	12.4	15.9
Concern	23.7	25.1	22.8	12.1	9.2	17.1	53.0	36.9	57.8	54.8	38.0	33.3	6.7	4.7	19.1	29.5
Calmness	59.4	48.6	52.0	33.0	24.0	14.0	2.3	3.8	11.1	7.5	20.7	9.5	21.7	28.2	20.5	9.1
Resentment	1.0	1.6	0.7	2.0	2.3	7.9	24.8	20.6	4.7	18.3	10.9	7.1	1.7	3.5	6.7	11.4
Bitterness	0.6	1.5	1.8	1.2	1.7	7.3	23.6	16.1	10.9	9.7	7.6	2.4	0.0	2.4	3.4	4.5
Disgust	0.2	0.1	0.1	1.2	0.3	5.6	23.8	27.5	12.5	10.8	5.4	2.4	0.0	2.4	4.5	13.6

Notes: Question filtered by those respondents who know the political leaders; Puigdm = Puigdemont; Junq = Junqueras; Dom = Domènech; Arrim = Arrimadas. Source: Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas (2018).

Table 4. Comparison of voters' emotions towards the political parties in the 1st of October referendum.

	In favour							Against						
	JxCat	ERC	CUP	CCP	PSC	Cs	PP	JxCat	ERC	CUP	CCP	PSC	Cs	PP
Pride	51.3	61.2	36.6	14.2	4.2	0.2	0.3	6.5	13.2	3.3	7.5	13.8	15.1	6.4
Fear	1.6	1.5	7.2	0.8	4.0	41.6	26.8	16.1	11.8	23.9	1.1	2.1	10.8	11.7
Hope	67.1	74.2	48.1	34.6	12.2	0.4	0.4	6.5	17.2	1.1	22.6	38.3	31.5	9.6
Anxiety	4.2	1.9	4.4	0.6	4.0	22.5	18.4	19.4	8.6	15.2	3.2	4.3	5.4	10.6
Enthusiasm	46.9	50.6	33.8	12.3	3.7	0.3	0.1	3.2	9.7	1.1	11.8	16.0	14.0	6.4
Anger	6.6	4.3	11.1	6.5	25.0	57.3	56.0	36.6	18.3	25.0	4.3	7.4	20.4	37.2
Hatred	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.5	3.1	17.7	16.8	3.2	2.2	2.2	0.0	0.0	3.2	7.4
Contempt	0.6	0.1	1.1	1.2	8.3	34.5	34.0	4.3	16.1	7.6	1.1	2.1	8.6	12.8
Concern	13.8	12.8	18.2	7.8	17.8	49.6	41.6	41.9	29.0	39.1	7.5	8.5	22.6	28.7
Calmness	42.0	48.7	28.1	23.3	11.8	2.7	3.4	5.4	14.0	5.4	11.8	22.3	18.3	11.7
Resentment	1.2	0.4	2.0	2.0	9.4	20.5	21.4	11.8	6.5	9.8	3.2	2.1	3.2	11.9
Bitterness	0.3	0.0	0.9	1.5	4.5	17.4	18.7	5.4	3.2	5.4	1.1	1.1	4.3	7.4
Disgust	0.3	0.0	0.8	0.5	5.2	24.1	24.6	5.4	4.3	4.3	1.1	1.1	6.5	9.6

Note: CCP = CatComú-Podem Source: Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas (2018).

In general terms, we can affirm that there was a differentiated emotional regime between those who voted in favour of independence in the 2017 referendum and those who voted against. The former felt more emotions, and, above all, positive emotions, mainly pride, enthusiasm, and hope, towards pro-independence leaders and parties, although also, to a lesser extent, negative emotions such as anger, concern, and even fear towards the parties that positioned themselves against Catalan independence, especially Cs. On the other hand, those who voted no in the independence referendum had a generally more negative emotional regime, with a predominance of anger, anxiety, concern, and fear towards the pro-independence parties, but also anger towards PP, which they held responsible for the drift of the conflict. Positive emotions included hope, calmness, and, to a lesser extent, pride, especially towards the PSC and Cs.

If we look longitudinally at the emotional regime of Catalans (Table 5), regardless of their participation or not in the referendum, we can see a gradual decline between 2018 and 2022 in positive emotions towards the pro-independence leaders (Puigdemont, Junqueras, and Riera/Sabater). In contrast, in the case of Puigdemont, we can see how, over time, there was an increased presence of negative emotions such as fear, resentment, and disgust, but, above all, contempt, anger, and concern. In the case of Junqueras, we do not observe such a clear trend, though. While anger, hatred, and contempt increased, anxiety and concern decreased. Puigdemont's flight, to avoid the imprisonment that Junqueras faced, probably had much to do with the differences in emotions towards the two pro-independence leaders. Meanwhile, in the case of Arrimadas and her replacement Carrizosa, in general terms, with the passing of time, the presence of positive and negative emotions decreased, coinciding with the loss of electoral relevance of Cs. In like manner, the presence of positive and negative emotions towards PP leaders also decreased.

Many of the trends observed for political leaders were confirmed by observing the evolution of the emotional regime towards political parties for the same period (Table 6). In the case of the pro-independence parties, JxCat, ERC, and CUP, the percentages of all positive emotions decreased over time, with anger increasing and concern remaining the same. In the case of Cs, the presence of positive and negative emotions decreased—and the same was true of its leaders—in parallel with the loss of political relevance of the party. In contrast, in the case of PP, positive emotions gradually increased over time, while some negative emotions such as fear and anger decreased.

Next, we identified the variables involved in the voting decision in the 2017 referendum by fitting an additive logistic regression model structured in three phases (Table 7). The variables were included in the model although no sociodemographic or contextual variable had significant effects on the vote once the emotional component was added. Thus, starting with the first model: On the one hand, there would be enthusiasm for JxCat, a mobilising emotion in the face of an electoral event. But also a lack of concern towards the same political formation and fear and anger towards its leaders (Torra and Puigdemont, respectively). These were the emotions that influenced the pro-independence vote. On the other hand, the model reveals that hope played a crucial role in this vote. First, because feeling hope in two pro-independence parties, ERC and CUP, and in one of the JxCat leaders, Torra, increased the probability of voting in favour of independence. Therefore, given that hope is an emotion that looks at the future, these two formations and the JxCat leader were able to make the possibility of Catalonia's secession credible. Secondly, the absence of hope in the PSC and its leader, Iceta, and in Cs, might also explain the yes vote. Hope is thus constructed as the dominant and determining emotion of the Catalan referendum, to the point that when hope weakens, the process runs out of steam (Lagares, Máiz, & Rivera, 2022).

Table 5. Comparison of emotions towards political leaders 2018–2022 (%).

	Puigdemont			Junqueras			Riera/Sabater			Domènech/Albiach			Iceta/Illa			Arrimadas/Carrizosa			Albiol/Fernández			Garriga	
	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	21	22	21	22
Pride	41.1	26.9	16.7	46.0	27.7	19.5	21.2	17.1	7.8	12.7	10.2	6.7	10.5	11.4	8.3	9.7	6.3	3.2	3.6	8.0	2.8	3.1	2.6
Fear	11.2	11.4	12.6	4.7	6.3	5.4	8.9	3.7	1.7	1.9	1.7	1.1	3.3	2.3	3.1	25.0	10.2	8.0	20.9	5.1	4.5	23.6	16.6
Hope	43.1	25.4	20.8	50.2	30.1	19.2	31.1	28.5	13.3	27.3	30.0	17.6	23.2	26.4	13.8	18.9	9.7	5.4	6.0	13.5	10.1	5.7	5.3
Anxiety	12.2	8.0	6.3	7.9	5.8	2.4	5.3	4.0	0.4	3.0	2.2	0.7	4.0	3.1	3.7	15.3	7.5	5.0	13.2	3.3	4.7	11.5	7.1
Enthusiasm	34.7	13.6	13.4	35.0	14.2	11.4	18.9	8.1	8.1	10.6	8.7	4.2	10.1	9.8	5.6	9.9	3.5	1.7	3.4	6.1	3.2	2.9	3.3
Anger	25.8	33.6	37.8	13.6	22.3	22.5	10.0	16.2	6.7	5.9	10.3	5.6	15.7	13.8	15.7	40.9	29.8	17.8	40.5	20.3	11.0	35.3	14.2
Hatred	24.2	4.0	5.5	1.5	2.5	4.3	2.2	1.7	0.9	0.9	1.5	0.9	2.1	0.8	2.6	9.0	3.3	2.9	9.2	2.2	2.8	7.3	4.8
Contempt	3.0	12.4	19.9	4.0	6.4	7.4	4.7	3.7	5.1	2.3	2.1	4.2	5.5	2.1	5.2	23.5	9.2	15.0	26.1	5.1	7.6	19.5	13.8
Concern	9.3	29.4	37.0	27.4	23.1	21.7	14.5	19.2	11	11.1	16.1	9.6	14.7	22.9	15.5	35.4	21.0	14.5	28.9	16.3	14.2	30.4	21.6
Calmness	28.4	9.1	10.1	34.1	13.1	16.4	23.7	10.9	11.6	21.0	9.4	10.3	21.4	19.0	14.4	12.0	4.5	5.5	7.0	9.4	7.8	3.5	5.8
Resentment	7.8	8.6	10.9	4.5	4.7	5.1	2.5	2.6	3.4	3.2	1.3	1.3	5.1	2.4	3.8	14.4	5.4	3.7	13.5	4.4	2.6	7.8	4.8
Bitterness	6.6	5.3	9.2	4.3	3.5	4.9	2.9	3.3	1.6	2.1	1.8	1.6	5.7	1.8	2.7	14.0	5.1	3.0	10.7	3.4	3.4	7.8	10.0
Disgust	5.9	6.0	14.7	2.8	3.7	6.0	2.5	2.8	4.6	1.1	1.4	1.5	4.2	0.9	4.0	14.7	5.3	6.8	17.5	3.3	4.4	12.0	10.9

Note: Question filtered by those respondents who know the political leaders. Sources: Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas (2018, 2021, 2022).

Table 6. Comparison of emotions towards political parties 2018–2022 (%).

	JxCat			ERC			CUP			CCP/ECM			PSC			Cs			PP			Vox	
	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	21	22	21	22
Pride	28.1	17.9	10.0	36.0	23.1	14.8	19.4	14.1	9.3	11.6	9.5	7.8	8.0	13.4	10.0	8.5	5.4	4.2	3.8	5.9	6.6	2.7	2.1
Fear	10.4	8.6	8.0	7.2	6.8	5.6	15.4	9.8	8.5	3.8	3.7	4.1	3.5	3.3	3.9	29.7	7.7	7.2	20.4	9.0	9.9	32.9	30.2
Hope	37.3	27.0	13.4	46.3	35.7	20.2	27.1	24.2	11.7	29.8	27.4	14.3	23.0	26.8	20.6	17.2	10.5	8.4	6.8	9.2	12.0	6.1	7.3
Anxiety	10.5	6.1	6.5	6.3	5.6	5.1	8.4	6.3	3.9	2.7	2.9	3.3	3.7	4.0	3.1	15.4	4.6	4.7	13.8	4.9	6.4	11.1	15.2
Enthusiasm	24.8	10.7	7.3	29.3	15.8	9.3	17.5	7.5	6.1	10.6	6.4	6.3	7.7	11.3	7.4	7.8	4.3	2.9	3.2	3.6	5.3	2.3	3.3
Anger	17.8	28.1	27.2	13.0	25.2	23.3	16.2	27.5	18.0	7.4	18.9	13.4	17.0	21.1	16.8	37.2	32.3	22.4	43.2	42.0	25.9	52.8	31.0
Hatred	2.6	2.3	3.6	1.9	1.9	2.2	2.9	2.5	2.2	0.6	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.4	1.1	9.7	3.0	4.3	10.4	3.2	6.4	9.0	9.5
Contempt	6.5	4.9	7.9	4.1	3.9	5.4	7.2	7.1	8.4	2.7	3.9	5.0	4.5	3.5	3.0	20.0	8.3	13.4	22.6	9.6	13.8	25.5	23.9
Concern	25.8	24.2	24.2	21.2	26.3	21.9	22.2	25.1	19.2	12.3	16.9	15.5	15.7	25.9	15.9	35.2	24.6	18.9	33.2	24.6	26.0	34.7	39.5
Calmness	24.4	11.4	6.5	30.9	17.7	12.5	16.4	8.2	5.2	18.4	9.1	7.8	17.7	18.8	15.7	10.9	4.3	5.8	6.7	5.9	9.4	2.9	4.1
Resentment	5.4	4.5	7.2	4.0	3.8	4.6	4.5	3.7	4.9	2.6	2.8	3.7	5.9	3.8	4.1	12.6	5.0	6.1	14.8	6.7	7.3	9.7	10.7
Bitterness	4.1	3.6	5.2	2.8	3.1	3.6	4.0	3.5	3.8	1.8	2.5	1.6	3.6	2.9	4.2	10.5	4.2	9.8	13.3	4.7	7.8	8.9	11.6
Disgust	4.0	3.3	7.5	2.8	2.3	5.3	5.0	3.8	5.4	1.5	2.4	6.1	3.8	1.9	2.9	14.0	4.7	8.9	16.2	6.7	9.2	22.2	20.3

Note: CCP/ECM = CatComú-Podem/En Comú Podem. Sources: Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas (2018, 2021, 2022).

Table 7. Pro-independence vs. non-independence voting model in the 1st of October referendum.

	Coef.	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Emotions				
Enthusiasm JxCat	β	1.874** (0.702)	1.749* (0.692)	
	Exp (β)	6.515	5.751	
Concern JxCat	β	-0.903* (0.429)	-1.019* (0.459)	
	Exp (β)	0.405	0.361	
Hope ERC	β	1.511*** (0.428)	1.121* (0.443)	1.183** (0.439)
	Exp (β)	4.529	3.069	3.263
Hope CUP	β	1.285* (0.538)	1.367* (0.562)	1.965*** (0.554)
	Exp (β)	3.615	3.925	7.136
Hope PSC	β	-1.377* (0.548)		
	Exp (β)	0.252		
Hope Cs	β	-3.845* (1.600)	-3.959* (1.888)	-3.850* (1.745)
	Exp (β)	0.021	0.019	0.021
Fear Torra	β	-2.401*** (0.756)	-2.625** (0.842)	-3.185*** (0.834)
	Exp (β)	0.091	0.072	0.041
Hope Torra	β	1.245** (0.437)		
	Exp (β)	3.474		
Anger Puigdemont	β	-0.924* (0.405)		
	Exp (β)	0.397		
Hope Iceta	β	-1.211* (0.524)	-1.940*** (0.453)	-1.853*** (0.446)
	Exp (β)	0.298	0.144	0.157
Sympathy				
Sympathy JxCat	β		2.378*** (0.786)	2.438*** (0.757)
	Exp (β)		10.786	11.453
Sympathy ERC	β		2.818*** (0.588)	2.507*** (0.595)
	Exp (β)		16.751	12.263
Sympathy CUP	β		1.852* (0.798)	
	Exp (β)		6.375	
Political attitudes				
Nationalist self-positioning				0.311*** (0.079) 1.365
Constant	β	1.221*** (0.524)	0.349 (0.332)	-1.282* (0.512)
	Exp (β)	0.298	1.417	0.277
N		555	541	538
Logarithm of the likelihood-2		199.934	171.590	170.745
R ² adjusted		68.3%	72.2%	72.3%

Notes: * p value ≤ 0.001 ; ** $0.001 > p \text{ value} \leq 0.010$; *** p value ≤ 0.05 . Source: Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas (2018).

In the second model, by introducing the variable of sympathy towards the main political leaders, the lack of hope in the PSC, the hope in Torra, and the absence of anger towards Puigdemont were no longer significant. Instead, it was the fact of feeling political sympathy towards the three pro-independence parties that increased the probability of choosing this option in the referendum, as reported in the literature (Lelkes, 2018). These

results also indicate that some of the emotions in the first model are also constitutive of identification with the parties.

Finally, in the third model, by incorporating political attitudes, enthusiasm and lack of concern towards JxCat, as well as party identification with CUP were no longer significant. Therefore, the vote in favour of Catalan independence was determined by the hope in ERC and CUP or the lack of hope in Cs and Iceta, in addition to the absence of fear towards Torra; by party identification with JxCat and ERC; and by nationalist self-placement—the more citizens feel more Catalan nationalist, the more likely they are to support independence. Consequently, we observed that, although it is not a *sine qua non* condition, the fact of being nationalist influences the vote for independence. Besides, it also demonstrates the predominance of identity cleavage over ideological cleavage. Once again, introducing party identification as an explanatory variable reduces the direct effect of emotions. This is to be expected since party identification already has a strong emotional component.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of secessionist referendums is to give legitimacy to the pro-independence aspirations of a territory considered to be a stateless nation. In the Catalan case, it has been the Catalan political elite that has built a narrative on the cleavage of nationalism. They used the old resource of the Manichean division between the “we,” the Catalans, harmed and oppressed by belonging to the Spanish state, and the “others,” the Spanish government, the oppressors, encouraging the generation of two new identities: the independentists and non-independentists. As the only way out of the identity conflict, they proposed the holding of the referendum of the 1st of October 2017, despite its unconstitutionality. Such has been the division of Catalan society in these two identities that the nationalist cleavage has proven to be decisive in the decision to vote for independence, with ideological cleavage having no effect, thus confirming our first hypothesis.

This finding represents an empirical contribution to the literature on the importance of identity in the decision to vote in self-determination referendums. However, unlike studies that have concluded that identity transcends partisan identification, in the Catalan case pro-independence and non-independence identities respond to voters’ political predispositions, such as partisan identification. Party identification with pro-independence political parties is the variable with the greatest effect on the decision to vote in favour of independence in the 2017 referendum, confirming our second hypothesis.

Given that self-determination referendums entail positioning on identity-related issues, they involve a high emotional engagement of citizens. Our analysis points out that, within the period 2015–2022, it was in 2018, a few months after the referendum was held in Catalonia, that the high point in the evolution of Catalan identity-related sentiment and emotional effervescence was reached. The increase in nationalist identification among Catalans was accompanied by a greater presence of positive emotions towards pro-independence leaders and parties, which decreased as the process faded, confirming our third hypothesis. For example, over 40% of Catalans felt pride and hope in Puigdemont and Junqueras in 2018. In 2022, however, except for hope in the former (20.8%), these emotions were felt by less than 20% of the population.

As has been argued, the secessionist drift in Catalonia is the product of an articulation of the political elites that is reflected in the existence of a differentiated emotional regime between those who voted yes in the

referendum and those who did not support independence. Citizens who voted for independence in the referendum felt positive emotions, especially pride, hope, and enthusiasm, towards pro-independence leaders and political parties, while they felt negative emotions, especially anger, concern, and even fear, towards leaders and political formations that defended the unity of Spain. This confirms our fourth hypothesis. In contrast, voters who showed their refusal to independence, felt fundamentally hope and calm towards the leaders who proposed intermediate solutions between independence and the maintenance of the status quo, perhaps as a counterpoint to the anger, concern, fear, and anxiety they felt towards the pro-independence elite—negative elements that guided their vote. Despite this, emotions played a bigger role in explaining yes voters than no voters, mainly because the secessionist idea looks at the future, and the positive emotion that is best associated with the future is hope.

In addition to partisan identification and nationalist identity, emotions are presented as the determining factors in supporting independence in our explanatory model. Party identification with JxCat was supplemented by the absence of fear towards one of its leaders, who ended up becoming the president of the Generalitat, Quim Torra, while party identification with ERC is accompanied by hope in the political formation when voting for the independence of Catalonia. To this feeling of hope in ERC, we should add hope in the CUP, thus increasing the probability of supporting independentism in the referendum and the absence of this emotion in both a leader who adopted a moderate position and an intermediate solution and a party that unequivocally advocated for the permanence of Catalonia within Spain. These results demonstrate the validity of H5. Positive emotions, however, were not the only emotions that influenced the voting decision. The absence of certain negative emotions towards the leaders themselves, or positive emotions towards leaders or parties against independence also played a part.

In short, our research provides evidence that an event of a positional nature can result in the division of society into two identity groups that respond to a common emotional regime, thus contributing to the literature on electoral behaviour in extraordinary consultations from an emotional perspective. However, unlike other research showing the influence of emotions towards the status of the territory opting for secession, we demonstrated that emotions towards political leaders and parties have a determinant effect on the voting decision, which also speaks of the influence of the political elites on the results of independence referendums.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Upon request to paloma.castro2@usc.es

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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About the Authors



José Manuel Rivera Otero is associate professor of political science at the University of Santiago de Compostela. He has been vice-chancellor and department director, among many other positions of academic and institutional responsibility. His main lines of research are the study of political and electoral behaviour, emotions in politics, leadership, and political parties. He is a member of the Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas of the University of Santiago de Compostela and has numerous publications in leading national and international journals.



Erika Jaráiz Gulías is associate professor of political science at the University of Santiago de Compostela. Her main lines of research are the study of political and electoral behaviour, emotions in politics, and satisfaction with public services. She is part of the Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas of the University of Santiago de Compostela. She has more than 70 publications in books and leading journals. She is currently vice-president of the Spanish Political Science Association (AECPA).



Paloma Castro Martínez is lecturer of political science at the University of Santiago de Compostela. Her main lines of research are the study of the extreme right, political and electoral behaviour, and emotions. She is part of the Equipo de Investigaciones Políticas of the University of Santiago de Compostela, and she has methodology formation.