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Secessionism in Liberal Democracies: What Do We Really Know About the Explanations of Secessionism?

Editors

Ferran Requejo and Marc Sanjaume-Calvet

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Academic Editors
Ferran Requejo (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain)
Marc Sanjaume-Calvet (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain / Open University of Catalonia, Spain)

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Table of Contents

Explaining Secessionism: What Do We Really Know About It?
Ferran Requejo and Marc Sanjaume-Calvet 371–375

The Catalan Syndrome? Revisiting the Relationship Between Income and Support for Independence in Catalonia
Jordi Muñoz 376–385

Preferences in Between: Moderates in the Catalan Secessionist Conflict
Laia Balcells and Alexander Kuo 386–398

Valence Secession? Voting Shocks and Independence Support in Scotland
Robert Liñeira 399–411

The Asymmetrical Effect of Polarization on Support for Independence: The Case of Catalonia
Juan Rodríguez-Teruel and Astrid Barrio 412–425

The Relevance of Language as a Predictor of the Will for Independence in Catalonia in 1996 and 2020
Jordi Argelaguet 426–438

Institutional Commitment Problems and Regional Autonomy: The Catalan Case
Francesc Amat and Toni Rodon 439–452

Justifying Secession in Catalonia: Resolving Grievances or a Means to a Better Future?
Anwen Elias and Núria Franco-Guillén 453–464

The Democratic Legitimacy of Secession and the Demos Problem
José L. Martí 465–474

An Imperfect Firewall: Quebec's Constitutional Right of Secession as a Device Against Domination
Lluís Pérez-Lozano 475–482

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Editorial

Explaining Secessionism: What Do We Really Know About It?

Ferran Requejo [1,*] and Marc Sanjaume-Calvet [1,2]

[1] Department of Political and Social Sciences, Pompeu Fabra University, Spain; E-Mails: ferran.requejo@upf.edu (F.R.), marc.sanjaume@upf.edu (M.S.-C.)
[2] Faculty of Law and Political Science, Open University of Catalonia, Spain

* Corresponding author

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Abstract
In this thematic issue we discuss what we really know about the explanations for secessionism. Over the last few decades, an increasing number of new analyses on secessionism have appeared, regarding both its normative and its empirical dimensions. We can distinguish at least three types of research questions that categorise the current analyses of secessionism: normative, explanatory, and pragmatic. Political theorists work mainly on the moral and political right to unilaterally secede, answering questions such as "under what conditions" this right is legitimate and "who" has this moral right (Requejo & Sanjaume-Calvet, 2015; Sanjaume-Calvet, 2020). Despite the importance of normative theories, these approaches do not provide explanations for secessionism, although most of them are built on implicit explanations of these phenomena. The field of explanatory theories of secession focuses mainly on the individual and/or aggregate preconditions and variables that correlate (or not) with the presence (or absence) of secessionist movements in specific territories. Through our general guiding question—"what do we really know about the explanations for secessionism?"—we try to disentangle the current explanations of secessionism by using empirical analyses, combining comparative politics and case studies. We bring together several different analytical perspectives, from political economy, nationalism, electoral behaviour, and institutional studies. Beyond these empirical perspectives, the issue puts forward some normative implications based on what we know and what we do not know about the existence of secessionist claims.

Keywords
federalism; regionalism; secession; secessionism; theories of secession

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "Secessionism in Liberal Democracies: What Do We Really Know About the Explanations of Secessionism?" edited by Ferran Requejo (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain) and Marc Sanjaume-Calvet (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain / Open University of Catalonia, Spain).

1. Introduction

Describing, explaining, and developing theories about secessions and secessionism is crucial for understanding these phenomena better and for developing potential solutions to them. In recent years, in a context of globalisation and growing illiberal trends (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019), certain intellectuals have upheld interpretations of secessionism that are sometimes based on misunderstandings, prejudices, or accepted ideas, rather than on specific empirical research. In this thematic issue we discuss what we really know about the explanations for secessionism. We address the subject by focusing on both individual and aggregate data in comparative politics, presented in a series of articles written by top researchers in this field.

2. A Growing Field of Scholarly Literature

Over the last few decades, an increasing number of new analyses on secessionism have appeared, regarding both its normative and its empirical dimensions. Two main interlinked factors explain the growing interest in

this topic. Firstly, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent dissolution of the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia led to the creation of several states, creating minorities and majorities in the new republics and fostering secessionism around the world (Lukic & Lynch, 1996). Secondly, since the 1980s, the academic debate on political liberalism has turned its interest to group rights and belonging (Bell, 1993; Requejo, 2001; Sandel, 1984). However, most normative and empirical analyses have generally followed parallel agendas, without a consistent epistemological balance existing between them.

We can distinguish at least three types of research questions that categorise the current analyses of secessionism: normative, explanatory, and pragmatic (see Table 1).

Political theorists work mainly on the moral and political right to unilaterally secede, answering questions such as "under what conditions" this right is legitimate and "who" has this moral right (Requejo & Sanjaume-Calvet, 2015; Sanjaume-Calvet, 2020). That is, the normative approach to secession generally focuses on the legality, legitimacy, and/or permissibility of this phenomenon from a political and moral standpoint.

Despite the importance of normative theories, these approaches do not provide explanations for secessionism, although most of them are built on implicit explanations of these phenomena. For instance, just-cause theories (Buchanan, 1991, 2004) assume that pro-independence movements emerge because of a perception of "lack of justice" among specific populations. There are thus moral criteria available to assess these demands and classify them as "vanity" or "just" secessions. For some reason that generally remains unexplained by these authors, "vanity" movements do not hold a valid claim, but often succeed in mobilising people for their cause. In a similar line of reasoning, "culturalist" theories assume that sub-national identities are the main driver of secessionism, but several sub-state identities without secessionist movements remain unexplained or are not considered as valid national identities.

This thematic issue explicitly focuses on explanatory approaches in order to consider the individual and collective causes of secessionism, and ends with some normative reflections based on the former explanatory empirical findings.

3. Some Analytical Features

The field of explanatory theories of secession focuses mainly on the individual and/or aggregate preconditions and variables that correlate (or not) with the presence (or absence) of secessionist movements in specific territories. This scholarly literature brings together quantitative and qualitative studies in political science with contributions from economics, sociology, international relations, historical studies, and political psychology.

Table 1. Approaches to secessionism.

Approach	Research questions	Objectives	(Some) Analytical deficits
Normative	What is happening? What should happen?	To prescribe • Legitimacy • Legality • National/cultural justice—individual and collective rights and freedoms	• Little empirical knowledge • Idealism • Moralism • Legalism • Implicit anthropologies (mainly Kantian)
Explanatory	What is happening? Why does it happen?	To explain • Individual approaches (social class, gender, languages) • Collective approaches (institutions, economics, history)	• Little theoretical knowledge • Partial inferences • Lack of clarity about "preferences" and aggregative methods • Ambiguity of the relationship between *erklären* vs. *verstehen* scientific explanations • Implicit anthropologies (mainly Hobbesian)
Pragmatic	What is happening? What is the best way to manage the conflict? How can we overcome the problem?	To find solutions (short, mid, and long term) • To hide, to marginalise, or to minimise the conflict	• Little empirical and theoretical knowledge • Localism • Inflation of "path dependency" features • Short-term conclusions

While the authors generally use the term preconditions to mean the necessary characteristics of each group (such as the existence of an identity and a territory), they generally use variables to refer to contextual and/or changing contingent aspects that might influence the probability of success of each movement in mobilising people to support secession. Additionally, some theories go further than this and: (a) point to these movements' immediate triggers of conflict; and (b) try to explain how successful they are (to achieve an independent state or to remain part of their parent state; see Figure 1).

A plurality of preconditions, variables, and triggers may be identified. Depending on the theory followed, these elements play different roles and have more or less explanatory weight in the emergence of secessionism and the support for it: diversity in ethnicity and/or national identity (Hale, 2000; Hechter, 1992; Horowitz, 1981; Wood, 1981); relative isolation or other geographical aspects (Sorens, 2012); cultural, economic, and other kinds of perceived (or not) grievances (Griffiths & Martinez, 2020); relative economic success or failure (Álvarez Pereira et al., 2018; Hechter, 1992; Webb, 2015; Wood, 1981); individual and collective socio-psychological characteristics (Basta, 2018; Dion, 1996); agency (Krause, 2017; Sanjaume-Calvet, 2021; Siroky et al., 2016); external recognition (Coggins, 2014; Griffiths & Muro, 2020); and variation in state formation patterns and institutional past (Roeder, 2007; Webb, 2015).

These elements generally constitute the central argument of a given explanatory theory of secession (or specific study on this phenomenon), and they tend to interact with the other potential preconditions and/or variables in each author's analysis. Moreover, these elements are sometimes presented as the explanation for the upsurge of a certain movement, while at other times they are used to try and explain the degree of support for a movement or its success (both at individual and collective levels). Obviously, in the empirical terrain, we usually observe a complex combination of these elements, one that might also change over time. It is evident that no single one of these theories is capable of encompassing a general or universal explanation of these kinds of movements across space and time.

Through our general guiding question—"what do we really know about the explanations for secessionism?"—in this thematic issue we try to disentangle the current explanations of secessionism by using empirical analyses, combining comparative politics and case studies. We bring together several different analytical perspectives, from political economy, nationalism, electoral behaviour, and institutional studies. Beyond these empirical perspectives, the issue puts forward some normative implications (political theory) based on what we know and what we do not know about the existence of secessionist claims. In doing so, we aim to bridge the gap between normative and empirical approaches in the current literature on secessionism. This thematic issue includes contributions that analyse secessionism from individual, aggregate, and theoretical perspectives. The current Catalan context is the most frequently analysed empirical case in the articles that follow, although it is not the only one.

From an individual perspective which delves into the explanatory factors of secessionism, Jordi Muñoz refutes Piketty's "Catalan syndrome" through an analysis of the economic determinants of support for secessionism (Muñoz, 2021); Laia Balcells and Alexander Kuo work on "moderate voters," i.e., individuals that do not have a strong territorial preference (Balcells & Kuo, 2021); Robert Liñeira performs a case study on Scotland and the "voting shock" valence effects of elections as critical junctures (Liñeira, 2021); Juan Rodríguez-Teruel and Astrid Barrio analyse the role of party and voter polarisation as "ethnic outbidding" dynamics (Rodríguez-Teruel & Barrio, 2021); and the last contribution at the individual level

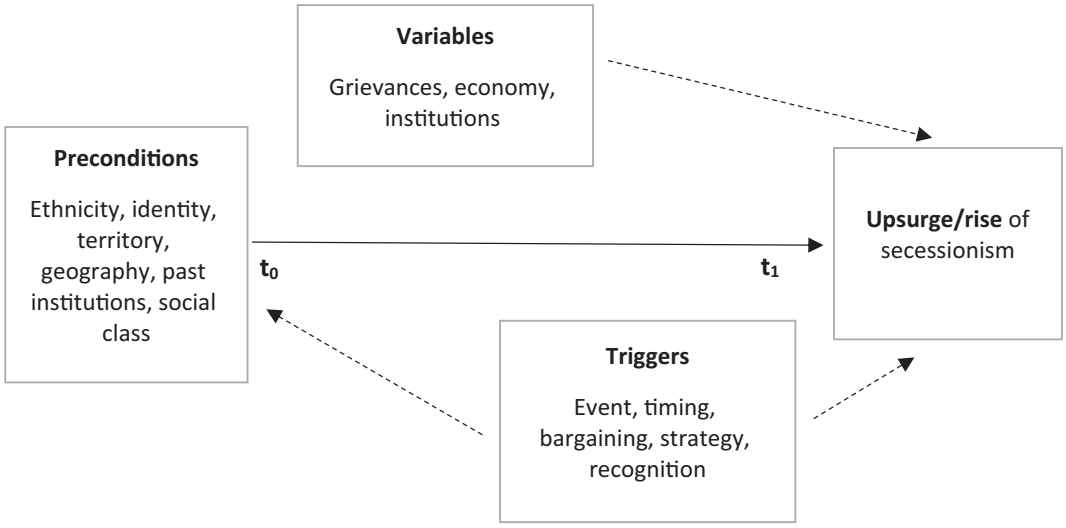

Figure 1. Main analytical elements of explanatory theories of secession.

is from Jordi Argelaguet, who focuses on the impact of language on secessionism and anti-secessionism (Argelaguet, 2021).

From an aggregate perspective, Francesc Amat and Toni Rodon's article, and Anwen Elias and Núria Franco-Guillén's contribution move beyond the micro level and include comparative data (Amat & Rodon, 2021; Elias & Franco-Guillén, 2021). Amat and Rodon introduce a large-N perspective that tests the "commitment problem" thesis using a dataset of regional autonomy; Elias and Franco-Guillén focus on pro-independence parties and their discourses during the secessionist rise that occurred between 2008 and 2018 in Catalonia. Both articles point to some relevant aspects and disregarded other aspects that are present in the scholarly literature, namely political discourses and the (lack of) credibility of territorial agreements.

Finally, from a theoretical perspective, José L. Martí and Lluís Pérez-Lozano discuss existing normative theories of secession (Martí, 2021; Pérez-Lozano, 2021). Martí describes the normative obstacles of legitimately redrawing borders, and proposes a potential solution based on disagreement and consensus; Pérez-Lozano, also working on the notion of legitimacy, reflects on the Quebec case and the role of constitutional firewalls in dealing with secessionist claims in liberal democracies.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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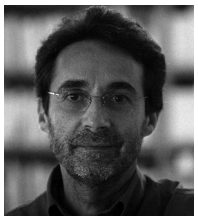
About the Authors



Ferran Requejo is professor of political science at Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona). He has been awarded the Rudolf Wildenmann, the Ramon Trias Fargas, and the Spanish Political Science Association prizes for best book. Furthermore, he has been director of the Self-Government Studies Institute, member of the Spanish Electoral Board of the Executive Committee of the ECPR and member of the Comparative Federalism Research Committee (IPSA).

Marc Sanjaume-Calvet is assistant professor of political theory in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona). He is a member of the Political Theory Research Group and coordinator of the Masters in Current Democracies. Former assistant professor at Open University of Catalonia, advisor at Self-Government Studies Institute—Institut d'Estudis de l'Autogovern, and visiting researcher at Edinburgh University (Scotland) and Laval University (Quebec).

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Article

The Catalan Syndrome? Revisiting the Relationship Between Income and Support for Independence in Catalonia

Jordi Muñoz [1,2]

[1] Department of Political Science, Constitutional Law and Philosophy of Law, University of Barcelona, Spain; E-Mail: jordi.munoz@ub.edu
[2] Institutions and Political Economy Research Group, University of Barcelona, Spain

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Abstract
The surge in support for independence in Catalonia (Spain) has received much political, journalistic, as well as academic attention. A popular account of the Catalan case stresses the allegation that motives relating to fiscal selfishness are behind the independence movement. The evidence presented in support of this argument is the positive correlation between income and support for independence. Some scholars, such as Thomas Piketty, even talk about a "Catalan syndrome," according to which support for independence can ultimately be explained by fiscal selfishness and the prospect of creating a sort of tax haven in Catalonia. As prominent as this argument is, in this article I show that it rests on weak theoretical and empirical grounds. In order to do so, I reassess the existing evidence, using a more nuanced empirical strategy that allows for non-linear relations to emerge and controls for potential confounders. Then, I also present new evidence based on recently published census-tract level fiscal data, merged with election results. Finally, I spell out the mechanisms and observable implications of the "Catalan syndrome" argument and show that fiscal selfishness is not an important driver of the Catalan independence movement.

Keywords
Catalonia; fiscal preferences; income; independence; Piketty; secessionism

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Secessionism in Liberal Democracies: What Do We Really Know About the Explanations of Secessionism?" edited by Ferran Requejo (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain) and Marc Sanjaume-Calvet (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain / Open University of Catalonia, Spain).

1. Introduction

In recent years, the question of Catalan independence has dominated the political agenda in Catalonia and Spain, and has been increasingly salient on the European stage as well. Once regarded as an example of moderate and institutionalized minority nationalism (Balcells, 1996), Catalan nationalist parties became increasingly supportive of independence from 2010 onwards. This move towards secessionist positions led to increased polarization and institutional conflict, culminating in the Autumn of 2017. A unilateral referendum on independence, heavily suppressed by the Spanish riot police, led to a series of contentious events that culminated with a declaration of independence passed by the Catalan Parliament, the suspension of the Catalan autonomy, and the imprisonment of the majority of the members of the government.

While the specific events were widely reported, the debate on the causes of this push for independence is far from settled. Both scholars and commentators have pointed in various directions. Some stress the importance of the grassroots movements (Crameri, 2015; Della Porta & O'Connor, 2017; Muñoz & Guinjoan, 2013), while others point in the direction of an elite-motivated movement (Barrio & Field, 2018; Barrio & Rodríguez-Teruel, 2017). Some accounts focus on the institutional mismatch between the Catalan self-government and the

increasingly pro-centralization dominant interpretation of the 1978 Spanish constitution, or refer to structural factors (Dowling, 2014).

Interpreting the secessionist turn in terms of economics is quite popular in the international arena. Catalonia has an above average GDP per capita compared to the rest of Spain, and the amount of interregional transfers has been a hotly debated political issue for a long time. Therefore, the independence push is easily interpreted as being caused by the wish to stop such transfers. This argument fits with some general findings of the comparative politics literature that tends to identify relative wealth as a determinant of aggregate support for secession in regions (Sambanis & Milanovic, 2014; Sorens, 2005). However, some recent studies also suggest that relative wealth is only important as long as there is cultural distinctiveness (Álvarez Pereira et al., 2018).

The idea of economic motivations being an important driver of the pro-independence push in Catalonia has gained traction, especially among external observers. It fits with common wisdom and is easily understood without much contextual knowledge. Indeed, there is evidence showing that economic considerations were indeed relevant to explaining support for independence, especially in the first moments of the independence push. Muñoz and Tormos (2015) showed that those respondents experimentally induced to expect positive economic effects of secession were up to five percentage points more likely to support it. However, the effect was often modest and conditional: Identity and partisanship appear as the main drivers of support for secession in a large majority of empirical models (Burg, 2015; Guinjoan & Rodon, 2014; Serrano, 2013).

Additionally, the temporal coincidence of the independence push with the great recession led many observers to conclude that the relative scarcity of the time made the question of the interregional transfers more pressing. While many casual observers interpreted the Catalan process in the context of the great recession, there is research showing that the impact of the economic crisis is not related to the increase in support for independence (Cuadras-Morató & Rodon, 2019). Indeed, many other political events are more likely triggers of the surge in support for independence, such as those related to the Constitutional Court ruling on the Statute of Autonomy (2010) or the victory of the right-wing, pro-centralization Popular Party in 2011.

A crucial debate, however, refers to the socio-economic bases of support for independence in Catalonia. Some work points to the positive association between income and support for independence (Guinjoan & Rodon, 2016). However, Della Porta and Portos (2020) refine the analysis and stress the broad cross-class coalition that united around the claims for self-determination. According to their analysis, the socio-economic composition of the pro-independence movement supporters was more complex and changing. The anti-austerity protests in Catalonia also influenced the movement's agenda that, in turn, reshaped its social bases.

Hierro and Queralt (2020) provide a more nuanced account of the individual materialist reasons behind the independence push. They show how trade factors are relevant, especially for depressing support among those that work in firms and sectors oriented to the Spanish market. Moreover, they find a positive association between skills and support for independence but attribute it to a better understanding of how the institutional framework of fiscal transfers across regions works and, hence, higher skepticism about any potential for reform.

However, the most widely known economic interpretation of the Catalan drive for independence is the version that the French economist Thomas Piketty develops in his recent book *Capital and Ideology*. Piketty coins the term "Catalan syndrome" to refer to a desire of the rich to escape from fiscal solidarity via secession (Piketty, 2020, pp. 918–935). He uses the Catalan case to illustrate the challenges that fiscal selfishness from the rich pose to fiscal redistributive systems: They induce what he calls the secessionist trap. According to Piketty, the desire to escape the burden of fiscal solidarity would be the main explanation for the independence push in Catalonia. He illustrates his argument with some descriptive evidence showing a positive correlation between income and support for independence.

However, as prominent as this argument is, it rests on weak theoretical and empirical grounds. In this article, I review Piketty's argument and the supporting evidence he presents in order to show its merits and limitations. First, I analyze the theory and explicitly spell out the observable implications that remain implicit in Piketty's work. Then, I reassess the correlation between income and support for independence. In order to do so, I present two types of empirical analyses of the correlation between income and independence. The first replicates and extends the analyses of Piketty and is based on the same data he used: survey data from the Center for Opinion Studies of the Catalan Government. After discussing the results and their limitations, I present the main empirical contribution of this article: the analysis of the newly released fiscal data at the census tract level, together with election results and other census variables. As I explain below, these data allow us to overcome some of the problems caused by the use of survey data and provide a more nuanced and complex picture of the relationship between income and independence.

Finally, I also empirically test a range of observable implications of the theory regarding the role of fiscal preferences and the functional form of the relationship. The results of these tests cast doubt on the validity of the fiscal selfishness theory, as the implied mechanisms are not supported by the data. In the concluding section, I discuss why this may be the case and present some alternative explanations.

2. Theory

As discussed above, there are many different explanations for the recent increase in support for secession in Catalonia. Some are purely political, while others privilege economic self-interest. A quite widespread interpretation is the so-called "revolt of the rich." According to this theory, Catalans' support for secession is explained by their relatively privileged position within Spain.

The "revolt of the rich" theory has many proponents. Most notably, Thomas Piketty, in his book *Capital and Ideology*, talks about the "Catalan Syndrome" and puts forward the fiscal selfishness argument (Piketty, 2020). Piketty suggests that high-income Catalans aim for an independent country to get a Luxembourg type of fiscal *haven*. This would explain not only why the pro-independence movement grew in Catalonia and not elsewhere in Spain but also why there is a positive correlation between income and support for independence within Catalonia. In Piketty's argument, the driver of this correlation within Catalonia must be fiscal preferences. The argument is as follows: The (Catalan) rich carry the burden of inter-territorial redistribution, so they are interested in secession. On the contrary, (Catalan) working classes are more supportive of fiscal solidarity and redistribution, given that they themselves are net beneficiaries of redistribution. Therefore, the independence drive should be (at least in part) motivated by the desire to set a low-tax system in Catalonia. Once relieved from the burden of fiscal transfers to the rest of Spain, taxes in Catalonia could be lowered.

Given the full theory, it is obvious that the mere correlation of income and pro-independence attitudes does not provide sufficient evidence in support of this specific theory. This correlation may be spurious, or it may be driven by different mechanisms other than those implied by Piketty's argument. While Piketty provides evidence on the association between income and support for independence based on survey data, such a correlation may be informative but is insufficient to demonstrate the fiscal selfishness argument.

There are several key observable implications that we should assess if we want to rigorously test the theory, but Piketty does not test them. First, the association between income and independence support should be causal and not spurious. In other words, it should not be explained by unobserved confounders. Second, if Piketty's argument was correct, we should observe that pro-independence supporters have distinct fiscal preferences: They should prefer lower taxes than those that oppose independence. A third and rather straightforward implication of the argument is that support for independence should increase monotonically with income and perhaps at a marginally increasing slope.

Testing these implications is the fundamental contribution of this article. First, I explore the correlations in more detail and then assess them one by one, using different sources of data.

3. Empirics: Reassessing the Correlation

In this section, I first reassess the main finding that Piketty presents in support of his argument, and then I provide a more systematic test of the observable implications of his theory. In doing so, I point to several shortcomings of the existing evidence that I attempt to overcome.

First, Piketty's data is exclusively based on public opinion surveys, just like virtually all other works that advance different versions of the economic explanation of support for independence. While these surveys constitute a crucial source of individual-level data, they are nonetheless subject to sampling and reporting problems. These problems are especially acute at both ends of the income distribution, as they are more difficult to interview. Moreover, the income variable is subject to a severe problem of non-response and misreporting (Neri & Zizza, 2010). This is why, in this article, I supplement the analysis of the survey data with an analysis of a novel register-based dataset at the census-tract level. Census tracts are small geographical areas, with an average of 1,000 voters. Merging various sources of data allows us to know the average income of the area, the electoral results, and crucially, some key control variables such as language, age composition, and place of birth.

The second limitation is that the evidence presented in support of the argument is based on bivariate correlations that do not have a causal interpretation. Indeed, these correlations could simply be spurious, as I discuss below. High- and low-income voters are different in other, non-economic dimensions, which may explain the observed association. In order to address this possibility, in reassessing the evidence, I include a limited set of controls. In order to avoid a potential problem of post-treatment bias that may erroneously push down the estimate of the correlation between income and support for independence, I limit the control variables to a handful of clearly exogenous variables. I am extremely cautious in not including any control variable that could be endogenous to income.

Finally, in the correlational analyses, linearity is frequently imposed by assumption. While the theory predicts a monotonically increasing relationship between income and support for independence, this is an empirical question that should be subject to empirical scrutiny. This is what I do below by relaxing the linearity assumption and allowing a non-linear pattern of relation between the two variables to emerge.

3.1. Survey Evidence

First, I use the same data sources as Piketty and most other works on support for independence: the public opinion surveys by the Catalan government's official Center of Opinion Studies (CEO). The CEO is a government-run office controlled by an expert and plural government body and holds high standards of transparency and data quality. Data and full documentation

are publicly available on the CEO website. The CEO runs a quarterly Public Opinion Barometer and has maintained an up-to-date cumulative file with all waves since 2014. Data quality and availability make this source of data very popular among researchers of Catalan politics. For completeness, in my analysis, I use the cumulative CEO dataset, which includes the surveys conducted between 2014 and 2020.

The analysis is quite straightforward. Essentially, I regress support for independence on declared family income. The dependent variable is a dichotomous question on whether the respondent supports independence. Therefore, the models I estimate are Linear Probability Models, in which the coefficients can be interpreted as expressing the expected change in the probability of supporting secession.

In order to address the question of potential spuriousness, I estimate two models: a simple bivariate regression, akin to the bivariate correlations that are often presented by the literature, and also a multivariate model that includes a full set of controls—family origin, language (mother tongue), age, and size of municipality and province. Family origin and language combined account for Catalan citizens' cultural heritage, which can adopt multiple combinations of place of birth, ancestry, and language. I also include survey fixed effects to account for time variation. The only caveat is that in the simple model, I also include a control for the number of people living in the household, as income is measured at the household and not at the individual level. Otherwise, the results could be confounded by varying sizes of household. Table 1 presents the results of these two models.

The models in Table 1 clearly show how income is positively associated with support for independence in the bivariate model. The coefficient remains statistically significant but is much smaller in the full model with the language, origin, and place of residence controls. Cultural factors and family origin matter substantially more. Those who speak Catalan and those born in Catalonia, especially from Catalan-born parents, are much more likely to support independence. These results are not surprising in the context of the literature. Another important piece of evidence comes from the *R-squared*. The fit of the models also points to the limited explanatory power of income: The model with income alone shows a very poor fit (0.03) while the full model with controls has a much higher fit (0.37).

In order to make the results more easily interpretable and allow for a non-linear relation to emerge, I plot predicted values of the dependent variable at each income segment as recorded by the CEO in Figure 1. In this case, instead of treating income as a continuous variable, I use a set of dummies for each income level. Results of this empirical exercise are presented in Figure 1. There are

Table 1. Household income and support for independence, 2014–2020.

	Simple model	Full model
Household income	0.03***	0.01***
	0.00	0.00
Size of household	−0.02***	−0.01*
	0.00	0.00
1st generation, mixed	−0.05***	
		−0.01
1st generation born in Catalonia		−0.07***
		−0.01
Born in rest of Spain		−0.11***
		−0.01
Speaks Spanish		−0.45***
		−0.01
Bilingual		−0.29***
		−0.01
Other languages		0.12
		−0.22
Age		0.00***
		0.00
Size of municipality		−0.01***
		0.00
Intercept	0.21***	0.30***
	−0.01	−0.02
N	23,370	23,370
R^2	0.03	0.37

Notes: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Source: Center of Opinion Studies (2014–2020).

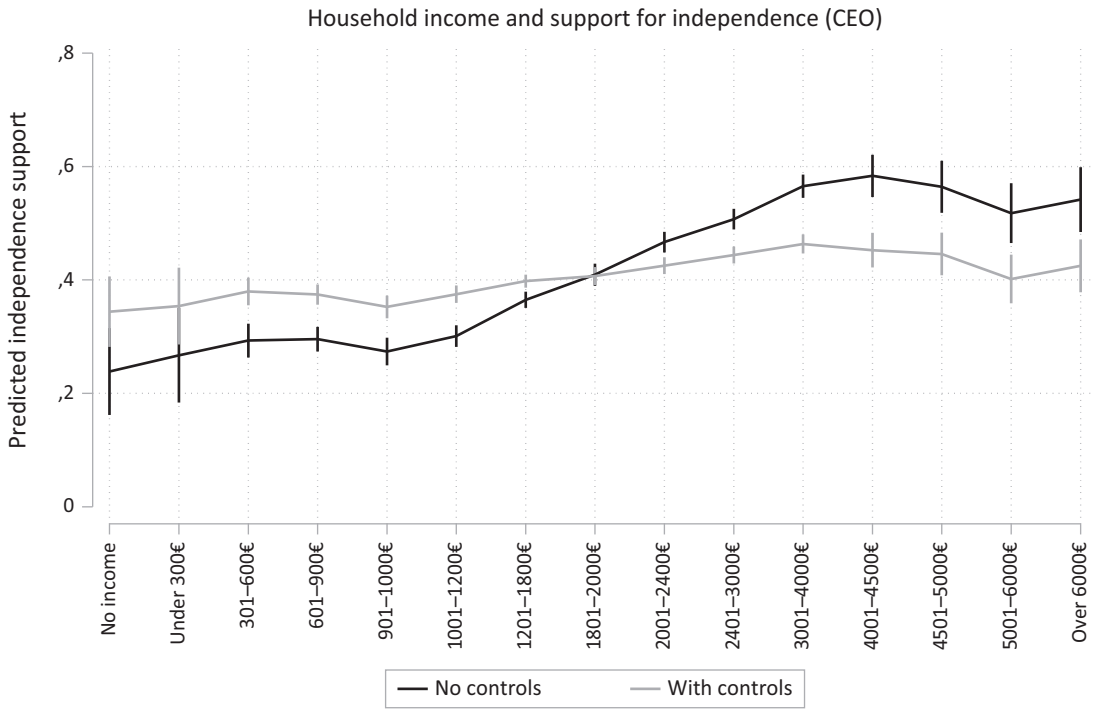

Figure 1. Income and voting for pro-independence parties.

two lines in the figure: The dark line corresponds to the bivariate model, with income and size of household only, and the lighter line corresponds to the multivariate regression with the full set of controls.

The first thing to note from the results in Figure 1 is that the bivariate correlation supports the strong association between income and support for independence that Piketty, among others, identified. Using the full CEO dataset, we see how lower-income respondents have an average level of support of about 30%, while the upper segment of the distribution is located at about 60%.

This substantial difference, however, is not linked to a strong predictive power of the income variable. The *R-squared* of the bivariate model is just 0.03. This indicates that income is, by itself, a poor predictor of support for independence. While, on average, differences in support across income groups are large, there is much larger variation within income groups. With such a poor fit, any interpretation of the Catalans' support for secession as a by-product of material interest must be qualified.

If we look at the full model, represented in the grey line, we can see how, once we account for differences in language, origin, age, and type of municipality, differences in predicted support for independence among income groups become much smaller. While we still observe some positive correlation, the range of variation of predicted levels of support is much narrower: between 35% for the low-income groups and 45% for the high-income respondents. From a 30 percentage point gap to a 10 percentage point difference. Moreover, as it was already apparent in the bivariate model, the relationship is far from linear and monotonic. In the high-income group, we see, indeed, some reversal of the trend. If anything, at the top of the distribution, support is somewhat lower than in the upper-middle group. Below I discuss this in more detail. Also, it is worth noting that this full model is more explanatory than the bivariate one, with an *R-squared* of 0.25.

3.2. Aggregate Data

The results above were based on the commonly used CEO datasets. However, in order to overcome the shortcomings of the survey data, I propose an additional empirical exercise based on census-tract data. While the use of aggregate data to infer individual patterns may be subject to a problem of ecological inference (King, 2013), the fact that we use small areas helps ameliorate it. Moreover, the quality of the data, which is free from the sampling and reporting issues that survey data suffer, may compensate for possible ecological inference problems. There are over 5,000 census tracts in Catalonia, with an average adult population of 1,099 voters.

In order to replicate the analysis at the census-tract level, I built a dataset in which I combined different sources of data. First, I measure income using tax return data provided by the Spanish national statistical institute (INE). The recently released INE dataset computes several indicators at the census-tract level based on fiscal information. Most notably, the dataset includes the 2017 average individual income as recorded in tax returns.

In order to measure support for independence at the census-tract level, I use the 2017 election results. I aggregate the vote for the three pro-independence parties (the centre-right Junts, the centre-left ERC [Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya], and the radical left CUP

[Candidatura d'Unitat Popular]) that run in the heavily polarized election of December 2017. The election, held shortly after the declaration of independence, the suspension of the Catalan autonomy, and the subsequent imprisonment or prosecution of the previous Catalan government, was generally regarded as a plebiscite on independence (Martí & Cetrà, 2016; Orriols & Rodon, 2016). While some other issues may drive voters' choices, arguably, that particular election was mostly about secession, so we can confidently use party support as an indicator of support for independence.

Using these data, I try to mimic the survey analysis as closely as possible. In order to do so, I regress vote for pro-independence parties in 2017 on average personal income at the census-tract level. As before, I estimate a bivariate regression and a multivariate model with controls, which include the share of population born in the rest of Spain, the share of the population that can speak Catalan, share of the population over 65, and size of municipality and administrative region fixed effects. Controlling for language and place of birth allows us to estimate the income effect net of any potential cultural or ethnic background confounder. Table 2 shows the results of four models: Models 1 and 2 impose a linear relation between income and pro-independence vote, while the remaining two models use the squared average income to allow a non-linear pattern to emerge.

Results indicate that if we impose a linear relation between income and pro-independence vote, we find a modest effect that quickly vanishes and becomes statistically indistinguishable from zero, once we introduce the basic controls. This points to the fact that it is mostly spurious. Moreover, if we look at the fit of the models, we can see how the bivariate model has a very low *R-squared* (0.07).

However, in columns 3 and 4 of the table, where I include a quadratic term, we observe how an inverse U-shaped relationship fits the data much better. The *R-squared* increases substantially, and the coefficients remain significant even after the inclusion of controls, albeit much reduced. This points to the limitations of the models that assume linearity. In this case, it becomes obvious that a quadratic term improved the fit and provides a more appropriate description of the relationship. As I discuss below, this indicates that there is a distinct behavior at the top of the income distribution, where we observe much less support for independence. This is important for the interpretation of the results.

In order to provide a better visualization of the models, I represent the relationship in Figure 2. In this case, I use a vector of income decile dummies in order to allow the flexible non-linear pattern to emerge with less parametrization. As before, two lines indicate the predicted level of support for independence at various income levels, together with the 95% confidence intervals. The dark line is calculated using the bivariate model estimates, while the grey line is derived from the multivariate regression. The bivariate association is strong and positive: On average, at the 10% poorest census tracts (the bottom decile), the pro-independence parties obtained around 37% of the vote, while in the top four deciles, they reached around 55%.

When we introduce the control variables in the model, the estimated income effect is substantially weaker: Everything else being equal, the difference between the predicted support for pro-independence parties in the low-income census tracts and the high-income areas is between five and eight percentage points. Moreover, in this case, the predicted increase is no longer monotonic, and we observe a small

Table 2. Income and pro-independence vote (2017), census-tract level.

	1 Bivariate	2 Multivariate	3 Bivariate	4 Multivariate
Average income (thousands €)	1.47*	0.32	9.39***	4.93***
	(−0.65)	(−0.37)	(−1.37)	(−0.7)
Av. income squared			−0.25***	−0.14***
			(−0.04)	(−0.02)
Share born rest of Spain		−0.79***		−0.83***
		(−0.04)		(−0.03)
Share speaks catalan		0.53***		0.39***
		(−0.02)		(−0.05)
Share over 65		0.53***		0.47***
		(−0.07)		(−0.1)
Size municipality (log)		−0.67		−0.67
		(−0.55)		(−0.41)
Intercept	29.42***	24.58***	−28.15**	1.35
	(−7.85)	(−2.76)	(−10.65)	(−3.62)
N	4,863	4,137	4,863	4,137
R^2	0.07	0.76	0.17	0.78

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

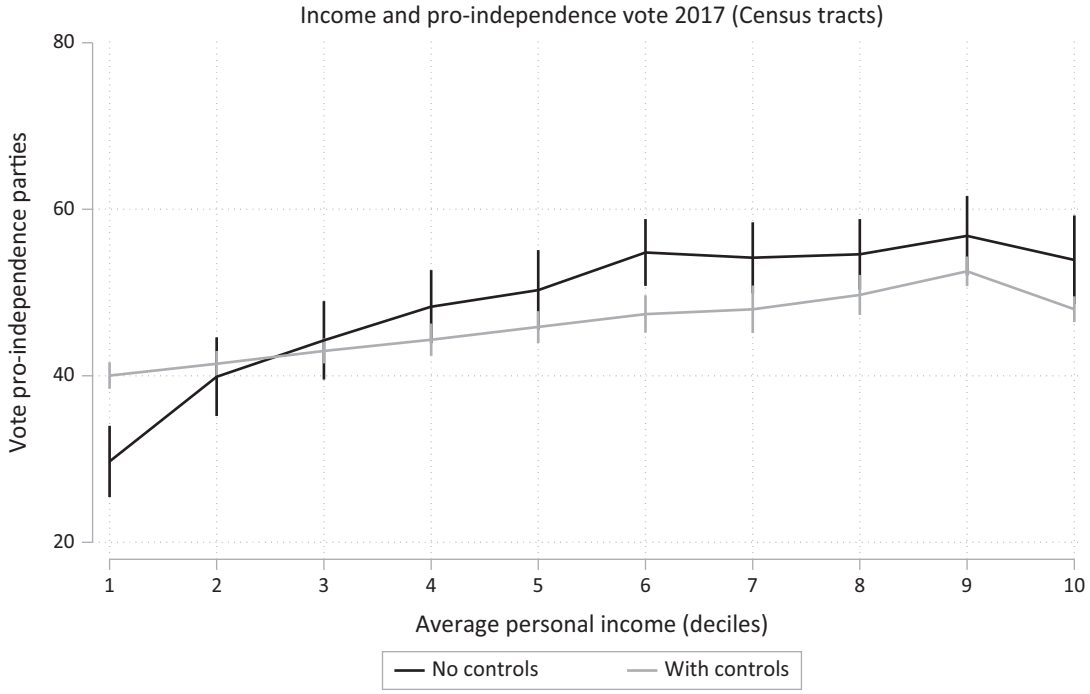

Figure 2. Income and voting for pro-independence parties, census-tract level.

decrease in the top decile. I explore this issue in further detail below.

Taken together, these analyses indicate that the strong bivariate association between income and support for independence is largely spurious, and if anything, non-linear. The key controls seem to be language and origin: The Spanish-speaking population and the population born in (or with roots in) the rest of Spain tends to express lower support for independence, and they have, on average, a lower income. This is suggestive evidence that the causal story of income and support for independence based on a fiscal selfishness argument may not hold. It may just be a by-product of cultural differences. This is, of course, relevant from a descriptive point of view, but the fact that the income effect rapidly vanishes is crucial to interpret it correctly. In order to delve more deeply into this question, in the next section I assess the mechanisms implied by Piketty's theory to see if they have empirical support.

4. Mechanisms

While Piketty (2020) enunciates a rather detailed argument on the mechanism of fiscal selfishness as the driver of the association between income and support for independence, he does not test the additional observable implications. This is important to test the theory, and more so after having established that the correlation is largely explained by other variables, and is best described as a non-linear relation.

Even if Piketty does not spell them out systematically, from reading his argument we can easily derive some straightforward observable implications of the theory. The first implication obviously relates to tax preferences: If the desire for lower taxes is the main driver of the correlation between income and support for independence, we should observe that those who favor secession prefer lower taxes than those who oppose it. This is the core of the Catalan syndrome argument. If it is an appropriate interpretation of the secessionist turn, then fiscal preferences should differ among supporters and opponents of secession.

In Figure 3, I explore this question. Using the same dataset used in Table 1, I plot the share of pro- and anti-independence respondents in the CEO surveys that support and oppose lowering taxes, even if it comes at the expense of lower funding for public services. As the figure shows, there is only a very minor difference in attitudes to taxation across pro- and anti-independence groups. In both groups, opposition to tax cuts is predominant, but if anything, independence supporters are less and not more supportive of tax cuts.

The fact that pro-independence attitudes are correlated with slightly more, and certainly not less, support for tax-based redistribution questions the validity of the fiscal selfishness argument. Tax preferences do not seem to be an important driver of support for independence. Remarkably, this is congruent with actual policy outcomes: As Agrawal and Foremny (2019) show, since 2014, when the decision of part of the marginal rates of the income tax was decentralized, the (pro-independence) Catalan governments did not lower taxes for the high-income citizens. On the contrary, the Catalan marginal tax rate increased up to two percentage points for those earning over 100,000€ with respect to the baseline central rate. Somewhat paradoxically, it was the regional government of the province of Madrid who decided to lower taxes for the upper-income segments. Therefore,

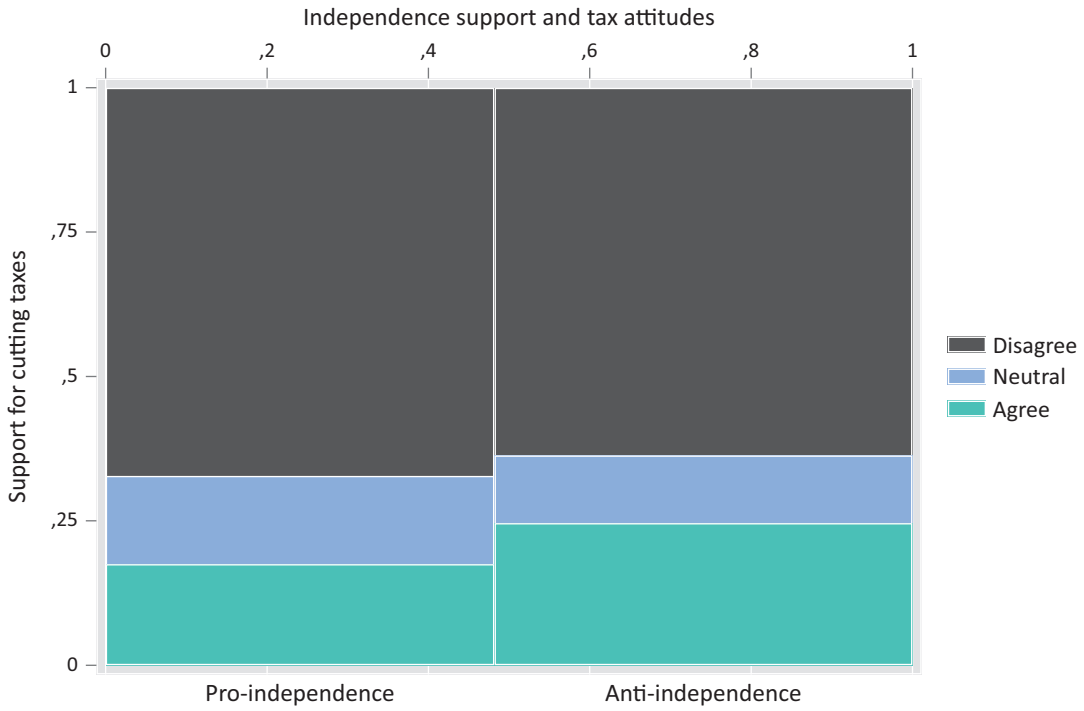

Figure 3. Support for independence and tax attitudes.

the core of the debate was not related to the tax rates but to which government had the authority to set them. And, if anything, the Catalan government was willing to increase taxes and the progressivity of the system during the period of heightened secessionist tensions.

Another observable implication that we can explore in more detail is the linearity and monotonicity of the correlation. In accordance with the Catalan syndrome argument, if the quest for a Luxembourg-style fiscal haven was a relevant driver of support for independence in Catalonia, the top incomes should be disproportionately more and not less supportive of secession. They would be the most to financially benefit from secession. In the models presented above, we can already see some downward trend at the top of the distribution. In Figure 4, I replicate the same analysis as in Figure 2 but using an

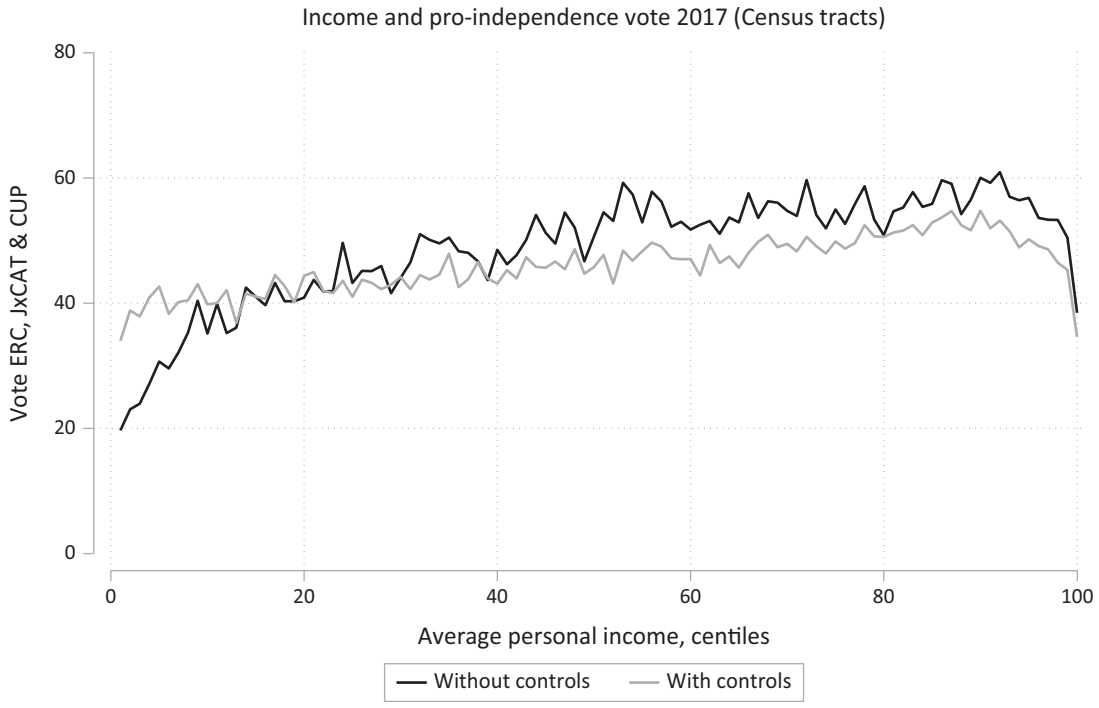

Figure 4. Support for independence and income centiles.

even more fine-grained approach: Instead of the income deciles, I use the centiles. This allows for full flexibility in the estimation.

Results in Figure 4 show the downward trend in the top 10% even more clearly. Most interestingly, this downward trend is very sharp among the top 1%—a very particular group. The census tracts in which those with the highest incomes live show substantially less support for independence than the majority of the distribution. Only the bottom 20% has a lower pro-independence vote than the top 1%.

Taken together, these results call the fiscal selfishness argument into question. First, the association between income and support for independence is largely explained by origin and language. Second, there is no evidence whatsoever that preferences for lower taxes are the driver of support for independence. Crucially, pro-independence respondents express slightly more favorable views of fiscal transfers. And, finally, it is important to note that the correlation between income and support for independence is not linear. The top incomes (those that would arguably benefit disproportionately from a Luxembourg-style tax haven) show less, and not more, support for secessionist parties when compared with the majority of the distribution.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

As we have seen, the correlation between income and support for independence is highly sensitive to the type of data we use, to the inclusion of control variables, and to the relaxing of the linearity assumption. Moreover, some key implications of the "fiscal selfishness" theory do not hold when subject to closer scrutiny: Pro-independence respondents are less, and not more supportive of tax cuts. And at the very top of the income distribution, there is a relevant downward trend in support for independence.

If the reason is not fiscal selfishness, how can we explain the correlation we found between income and support for independence? There are essentially two alternative explanations. The first being that the correlation is merely spurious and has no causal interpretation. Other non-economic confounding factors (most notably, family origin/language) may explain the observed association. This is what I have tested in the models in which I included the controls. As evident, both in the survey and the aggregate data, these factors account for a large part of the association between income and support for independence.

Essentially, this is related to the fact that a substantial part of the Catalan population was born in or descended from people born in other regions of Spain. During the period of approximately 1950–1970, a huge migration inflow, especially from southern Spain, populated the industrial areas of Catalonia. It was not the first massive immigration wave that Catalonia experienced during the 20th century: An early and intensely industrialized region attracted large numbers of workers from rural areas. Today these immigrants, and to some extent also their offspring, are more likely to have Spanish and not Catalan as their mother tongue, have a relatively lower average income, and express less support for secession. Therefore, the main driver of the observed pattern is not the financial considerations but the cultural differences.

However, in these models, there is still some remaining association that is unaccounted for by the control variables. Once we control for origin and language, it becomes much weaker but still statistically significant. A possible explanation is that we are missing some additional controls.

Nonetheless, another possibility is that this correlation is caused by other economic factors that may correlate with income but express a different story. Some recent work has tried to address them. Hierro and Queralt (2020) show that respondents working at sectors and firms specializing in the Spanish market are more reluctant toward independence, while those specializing in foreign markets are no more opposed. They also find an association with skill levels that they attribute to a better understanding of the institutional context of redistribution and hence a higher skepticism with regards to the possibilities of accommodation of regional demands within Spain. This work probably points in the direction that the research on the political economy of secessionism in Catalonia should go: a more nuanced approach that also considers Catalonia's complex trade relations with Spain and the rest of Europe.

Summing up: In this article, I have shown that the correlation between income and support for independence in Catalonia is in large part explained away by cultural and linguistic factors. In addition, the fit of the simple models in which I regressed support for independence on income was extremely poor: Income, by itself, is hardly predictive of support for independence.

Moreover, the pattern of association is clearly not linear: As we move towards the very top of the income distribution, support for independence goes down. Nevertheless, most importantly, the main finding that I have presented here is that fiscal attitudes are not drivers of this correlation, as implied in Piketty's "Catalan syndrome" argument. I believe that taken together, all these pieces of evidence cast doubt on the fiscal selfishness argument and point to the need for a more nuanced understanding of the recent surge in pro-independence attitudes in Catalonia. There is abundant evidence that economic considerations are not the main driver of public opinion, and in any case, the economic factors are more complex than the pure fiscal selfishness argument implies, in spite of this argument regularly being put forward by certain observers, pundits, and scholars.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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About the Author

Jordi Muñoz is an associate professor at the Department of Political Science, Constitutional Law and Philosophy of Law of the University of Barcelona, and a fellow at the Institutions and Political Economy Research Group. He holds an ICREA Academia Award. He got his PhD from Pompeu Fabra University (2009). He was a postdoctoral researcher at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and visiting researcher at the University of Gothenburg (2012) and Yale University (2007–2008). His work has appeared in journals such as *The Journal of Politics*, *Political Analysis*, *Comparative Political Studies*, and *Political Science Research and Methods*, among others.

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Article

Preferences in Between: Moderates in the Catalan Secessionist Conflict

Laia Balcells [1,*] and Alexander Kuo [2,3]

[1] Government Department, Georgetown University, USA; E-Mail: laia.balcells@georgetown.edu
[2] Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, UK; E-Mail: alexander.kuo@politics.ox.ac.uk
[3] Christ Church, University of Oxford, UK

* Corresponding author

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Abstract
Recent research on territorial preferences focuses on explaining who supports or opposes independence. However, this research overlooks the relevance of an "intermediate" category of citizens who may oppose the territorial status quo of a sub-state territory but not support independence. We use evidence from the critical case of Catalonia to illustrate the relevance of individuals with such preferences for policies and outcomes highly relevant to secessionist conflicts. We present four sets of findings using two-wave panel data from December 2017 (just prior to the December regional elections when Catalan independence was the most salient and contentious issue) and September 2018. First, we find that a sizable plurality within Catalonia supports greater autonomy short of independence; conventional sociodemographic variables explaining support for independence do not strongly account for this preference. Second, such pro-autonomy individuals have considerably more intermediate attitudes regarding the key "on the ground" actions that the Spanish and Catalan governments pursued during the crucial independence drive in 2017. They were more opposed than pro-independence individuals to the unilateral independence efforts, and more opposed than pro-status quo individuals to the Spanish government's actions to counter these efforts. Third, they expressed emotions around the secessionist conflict similar to pro-status quo individuals. Finally, using an embedded survey experiment, we find that pro-autonomy individuals are more trusting of both the central and regional governments regarding their abiding by an agreement to resolve the conflict, and are less easily "polarized" through priming. Overall, these findings indicate the importance of further analyzing individuals with intermediate territorial views in secessionist conflicts.

Keywords
autonomy; Catalonia; federalism; secession; Spain; territorial conflict

Issue
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1. Introduction

The recent study of territorial preferences in secessionist regions has primarily focused on explaining who supports or opposes independence. This is understandable due to the increasing salience of secessionist movements, as in Catalonia and Scotland. However, there is often a category of citizens who oppose the territorial status quo of a sub-state territory, but do not support secession (i.e., they support more autonomy for the region, but not independence). Although this "pro-autonomy'' category is overlooked in the scholarly literature, it can be key to the political dynamics of the region, such as by withholding support of secessionist political parties. Further, territorial "moderates" can have a role in mitigating social polarization surfacing during secessionist crises. Such individuals often constitute a non-negligible share of the population even when self-determination issues are politically salient; in Scotland, for example, recent surveys show that over

40% of the population would want "increased powers for the Scottish parliament" but not independence (YouGov, 2021).

This article presents evidence from the critical case of Catalonia to illustrate the relevance of individuals who have intermediate territorial preferences (i.e., between the status quo and secession), which we classify as generally pro-autonomy. What are the political implications of these preferences in terms of resolving secessionist disputes? As relatively few studies of this preference exist (particularly from recent years), our goal is to present baseline theoretical expectations and instructive empirical patterns. We examine sociodemographic correlates of this preference and analyze how it correlates with support for policies and attitudes relevant to secessionist conflicts. We also explore whether such individuals differ in terms of their emotional reactions to the secession issue. Finally, we assess whether pro-autonomy individuals differ in their trust of both regional and central governments in a hypothetical territorial agreement scenario, which would be a key component in long-term resolution of the conflict.

We find that that the most relevant distinguishing feature of pro-autonomy individuals is that they self-report moderate levels of Catalan identity and are slightly more likely to be older and female; few other conventional sociodemographic characteristics distinguish them from those who support the territorial status quo or less autonomy for Catalonia (hereafter labeled "SQ & less autonomy"). Such pro-autonomy individuals tend to agree with pro-SQ & less autonomy individuals on opposition to actions the Catalan government took, and had similar emotions regarding the political context, but they also show more moderate sentiments than those in the two territorial extremes. Also, pro-autonomy individuals oppose more firmly the repressive actions of the Spanish government towards the pro-independence movement than pro-SQ & less autonomy individuals. Finally, pro-autonomy individuals display similar levels of trust towards both the Spanish and Catalan governments and are the least susceptible to trust priming, as captured by an experiment embedded in our survey.

1.1. Literature Review and Motivation

Our study is motivated by the recent proliferation of literature focusing on the individual-level correlates or determinants of support for secession within democratic countries, but that generally examine binary policy preferences (see, e.g., Bourne, 2014; Hierro & Queralt, 2021; Muñoz & Tormos, 2015; Serrano, 2013). This literature, in unpacking group-level claims and focusing on individual preferences, challenges and builds upon classic works focusing on support for secession based on group-level sub-state identities, which tended to downplay the nuances of individual territorial preference in favor of a group-level analysis (see Horowitz, 1981, and his typography regarding ethnic separatism; for typologies of political struggles of nations see Guibernau, 1999; Hechter, 2000).

Such recent explanations for secessionist preferences largely fall into two main categories: identity (ethnno-cultural, religion) and material-based (often described as economic benefits or elided as "rationalist" explanations). For example, Balcells et al. (2015) consider regional redistributive preferences and their impact on support for independence in Catalonia. Some authors note the difficulty in differentiating the causal role of these factors, and that they can be mutually reinforcing. For example, Sorens (2008), after differentiating between secessionist and regionalist parties, finds that secession is more tied to economic interests, whereas regionalism is more tied to cultural and identity-based interests. Several recent studies have focused on the confluence of economic and ethnic factors in accounting for individual-level preferences for secession in select regions. For example, Curtice (2013) uses survey data among Scottish/British citizens to argue that nationality (or identity) has much less to do with support for independence than material (economic) factors. Similarly, Muñoz and Tormos (2015) find that economic considerations are an important driver of territorial preferences in Catalonia. However, they note the importance of looking at variation in reasons for pro-independence views and find that economic considerations mostly matter when people do not have a strong national identity. Ormston (2014) meanwhile finds that women tend to support independence less than men, due to their uncertainty of what benefits independence would yield.

Few studies discuss the viability of an "intermediate" category of citizens, or consider the "in between" group as a meaningful unit of analysis. One older exception is Guibernau (2006), who presents descriptive data regarding support for various forms of federalism or territorial reforms in Canada, Spain, and Britain from the late 1990s and 2000s. However, that study considers a period in which secessionism in the two European countries was much less salient in the political arena and does not focus on the correlates and implications of these territorial preferences. We also note a tradition of studying support for the devolution process in Scotland in the early 1990s (e.g., Pattie et al., 1999), as well as research on decentralization preferences in other contexts. For example, Ricart-Huguet and Green (2018) find that ethnic identity and wealth are correlated with preferences for greater regional decentralization in Uganda.

Overall, neglecting those with "intermediate" preferences is significant, not only because such individuals constitute an important segment of the population, but also because such preferences can have key political implications. As Guibernau (1999) and others have noted, although a vocal fraction of stateless nations seek independence, increased autonomy within existing institutions has frequently been proposed as a long-term solution, even though such reforms' empirical record at reducing independence demands remains mixed and

contentious. Our broad point is that in cases where secessionism is salient, those who are against the status quo but are not in favor of secession merit greater understanding. Such individuals might change their territorial preferences in either direction, which makes them pivotal in such political contexts. To this end, we explore the pro-autonomy, "intermediate" category at the height (thus far) of the secessionist conflict in Catalonia, when such an option was less visible and salient than the more extreme territorial positions. Who are the people that, amid the polarizing secessionist conflict, support greater autonomy? What are the implications of the existence of this differentiated group?

2. The Case of Contemporary Catalonia

Contemporary Catalan nationalism has its roots in the 19th century (Balcells, 2013). In the 1930s, Catalonia achieved autonomy within Spain, with a regional parliament and a government, among other institutions of self-rule. However, during the Francoist dictatorship that followed the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), cultural rights for national minorities in Spain (i.e., Basques, Galicians, Catalans) were repressed, and Spanish nationalism was imposed by state institutions (Balcells & Villamil, 2020). Since the transition to democracy after 1975, national minorities regained some level of self-rule in a decentralized system that fell short of full federalism (Beramendi, 2012). The process of decentralization was uneven among national minorities, with the Basque country and Navarra regions attaining fiscal privileges not afforded to the other regions. This differential lack of fiscal autonomy, grievances over regional redistribution, and desire for increased political autonomy, combined with commitment problems between the center and the periphery (Amat & Balcells, 2021; Requejo et al., 2020), have historically spurred tensions between Catalonia and Madrid.

In 2010, after a long set of negotiations that culminated in central and Catalan government approval of a new Catalan statute of autonomy (a regional constitution), the Spanish Constitutional Court revised and interpreted the statute in a manner that significantly weakened the region's autonomy. Support for independence then increased from a previous level of 15% in 2006 to around 45–50% in 2012 (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió [CEO], 2021). Support for more autonomy was a prevalent choice in Catalonia until around 2010, when support for independence grew at the expense of this middle category. Political support for separatism further increased in 2015, when the Catalan premier Artur Mas called for a snap election around the independence issue. The Together for Yes (Junts pel Sí) coalition won a majority of the seats in the Catalan Parliament (71 seats; 44.4% of the popular vote) with a program to implement independence within 18 months. Carles Puigdemont, the new Catalan premier, then called for a unilateral referendum on independence. The referendum was scheduled for October 1, 2017, and controversially approved by a set of laws passed in the Catalan Parliament (38% of MPs did not participate and an additional 8% abstained in the vote).

In the weeks prior to the referendum, the political climate became increasingly heated as the Catalan government continued its preparations while the Spanish government tried to prevent it, including detaining several members of the Catalan government who were allegedly involved in its organization. The Spanish government sent thousands of national policemen to Catalonia to deter and prevent voters and activists from organizing (Barceló, 2018). Despite the Spanish Constitutional Court suspension of the referendum laws and central government threats about legal consequences, the Catalan government proceeded with the referendum on October 1. This led to an unprecedented crackdown by Spanish police forces as they attempted to shut down polling stations (Balcells, Dorsey et al., 2021). On October 3, the King of Spain delivered a controversial speech against Catalan separatists and there was a labor strike and large demonstration in Barcelona against the actions of the state. A few days later, there was a counter-rally against the independence process and the actions of the Catalan government. The crisis continued with the Catalan Parliament passing a resolution declaring Catalonia independent of Spain on October 27 (although with no operational effects), and the Spanish Senate quickly voting for the temporary suspension of Catalan autonomy, activating for the first time a constitutional clause (article 155) allowing the central government to impose direct rule in a region. This led to the dissolution of the Catalan government, and the central government called for new regional elections, which were held on December 21, 2017.

Meanwhile, the Spanish judiciary began the prosecution of prominent secessionist leaders, including social activists Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez, who were jailed under charges of sedition for attempting to block police raids on Catalan governmental offices. Members of the former Catalan government and the High Chair of the Parliament were charged with sedition and rebellion. Some fled the country; those who stayed in Spain were imprisoned and were later brought to trial in the Supreme Court of Spain.

In the December 2017 regional elections, the three main pro-independence parties secured another parliamentary majority (with 48.5% of the vote), then led by Quim Torra. In June 2018, socialist leader Pedro Sánchez won a motion of no-confidence in the Spanish Congress and became President, replacing conservative Mariano Rajoy. Although this led to some prospects of negotiations between the central government and the Catalan government, the stalemate persisted. In October 2019, after the sentencing by the Supreme Court of the imprisoned politicians and social organizers to 9–13 years of prison on charges of sedition, mass demonstrations and violent protests occurred throughout Catalonia. In June

2021 the central government officially pardoned the nine Catalan separatist leaders who were jailed and negotiations between the Spanish and Catalan government resumed shortly after.

3. Expectations

In the context of a secessionist conflict, who are the individuals supporting intermediate options such as federalism or more autonomy for the region, but neither outright secession nor maintaining the territorial status quo? Building on documented correlations between substate identity and secession support (Hierro & Queralt, 2021; Muñoz & Tormos, 2015; Serrano, 2013), we first expect a correlation between individuals who have moderate levels of sub-state national self-identification (in this case, Catalan as opposed to Spanish) and likelihood of preferring a "greater autonomy" option relative to independence or the status quo. Similarly, a reasonable expectation is that individuals who are in a mixed-language (Catalan and Spanish) household are more likely to support greater autonomy relative to the two other options. We further expect that pro-autonomy individuals might be less supportive of actions by either central or regional governments that are perceived to be illegal or extreme. That is, such individuals may be oriented towards "process" concerns as a component of policy preferences (for them, how to achieve a goal may be as important as the goal itself).

4. Empirical Design

Catalonia is a natural and important testing ground for measuring how much people support an intermediate territorial outcome in the context of a secessionist conflict, and what are the implications of such intermediate preferences. To examine these issues, we designed a survey, which we fielded online between December 11 and 20, just prior to the 2017 regional elections. Our representative sample consisted of 2,537 residents of Catalonia aged 18 or older, fulfilling age-category and gender quotas. The survey was fielded by Respondi in Catalan or Spanish (respondents chose their preferred language at the beginning of the survey). To test the stability of preferences after the elections and after the re-imprisonment of several independentist leaders, we fielded a follow-up survey between September 19–30, 2018; 63% respondents were re-interviewed in the second wave (we registered two pre-analysis plans with EGAP prior to receipt of data, and the study received IRB approval from Georgetown University and the University of Oxford). Tables A1 and A2 in the Supplementary File provide basic descriptive statistics of the sample, including territorial preferences, language spoken at home, family origins, education, income, and gender. The composition is representative of the regional population, very similar to the samples used by the CEO, with a slight skew of younger respondents across waves (our results remain substantively very similar when estimated with weights by age and gender).

Our main variable of interest is territorial preference, with attention to support for the intermediate category of greater autonomy. We measure territorial preferences by asking individuals for their preferred political status of Catalonia. Following standard survey questions on this issue (i.e., those by the CEO), the response options were: They prefer Catalonia to be an independent state (we will also call this option "Catalan Republic"); Catalonia should have more autonomy but not independence (we will also call this option "more autonomy"); the status quo should be kept; Catalonia should have less autonomy. For our analyses below, we recode to consider three broad categories: "Catalan Republic," "more autonomy," and "SQ & less autonomy." The Supplementary File (Part B) includes coding details of the control variables, and Tables A1 and A2 display the descriptive statistics of all our data.

The bulk of our empirical results focus on the first wave of the survey; we present selected results from the second wave here and more in the Supplementary File. The second wave patterns are very similar to the first, indicating a remarkable stability of preferences over time (see Table A3 in the Supplementary File). In addition to the observational analyses, which focus on the correlates of the intermediate territorial preference (i.e., more autonomy) and on the implications of such preference—for example, for political choice (i.e., vote), views on governmental actions, and emotions—we also present the results of an embedded experiment (within the second wave of the survey) that assesses relative trust of the Catalan versus Spanish governments with regards to their abiding by a hypothetical center-region political agreement.

5. Results

5.1. Correlates of "More Autonomy" Support

In the first wave of the survey (N = 2,537), 44% of respondents prefer a separate Catalan state, 35% want more autonomy, 20% support the SQ & less autonomy. In the second wave (N = 1,721), the patterns are very similar, with slightly more supporting independence (nearly 47%), 33% supporting more autonomy, and 21% supporting the SQ & less autonomy (see Table A3 of the Supplementary File).

Which variables are correlated with support for greater autonomy? One interpretation of territorial preferences is that they constitute a natural "ordering" from greatest autonomy (independence) to least (the status quo), but we avoid estimating an ordinal logit regression as the baseline specification after conducting a Brant (1990) test and ascertaining that the proportional odds or parallel regression assumption is violated. We estimate a multinomial logit regression model, and focus on the following independent variables: female gender, education, age, adjusted income, left-right ideology,

primary language spoken at home, and national self-identification or Catalan identity (see coding details in the Supplementary File, Part B). In alternative models (Supplementary File, Table C1 and Figure D2), we also assess the effect of family origins (a variable basically capturing if the respondent and their parents were born in Catalonia or not). Figure 1 displays the plotted marginal effects of the sociodemographic variables on each of the three territorial preference categories, using the first wave of the survey (note that the results of the second wave are very similar; see Supplementary File, Figure D1). Although our focus is on "more autonomy" (the middle panel), we find it instructive to compare the relative marginal effect of covariates on all three territorial preferences. All figures should be interpreted such that if the plotted coefficient's confidence interval overlaps with the vertical line there is not a precisely estimated effect relative to the baseline level of the variable. Each of the plotted predicted effects can be interpreted in percentage points: For example, the upper right figure indicates that those with high levels of Catalan self-identification are nearly 80 percentage points more likely to support independence relative to the baseline category, which are those with lowest levels of Catalan identity.

Figure 1 does not indicate support for our hypothesis regarding the role of language but does confirm the expectation regarding identity. For the language categories, relative to the "Spanish language only" group, both "mixed language" and "only Catalan language" individuals are *less* likely to be more pro-autonomy; the latter are much less likely to be pro-autonomy than the other two language categories because they are more strongly pro-independence (people who speak only Catalan are 20 percentage points more likely to support a Catalan republic). The top two lines of the figure indicate stronger support for the role of Catalan (vs. Spanish) national identity in accounting for moderate territorial preferences.To measure national identity we use the following question: "Could you describe on the scale if you feel very Spanish or very Catalan, with 1 indicating you feel only Spanish and 10 indicating you feel only Catalan?" We recode the answers as approximate "terciles" of 1–4, 5–7, 8–10. The figure shows a strong correlation between identity terciles and territorial views. The middle tercile is most strongly correlated with support for autonomy and more so than with independence. The effect is large, 30 percentage points relative to the lowest tercile. The highest tercile of Catalan identity is *negatively* correlated with support for autonomy, as such individuals overwhelmingly prefer independence. While we are not claiming a causal relationship, we highlight this intermediate identity as a relevant variable that political elites seek to influence (Hierro & Gallego, 2018) and that is strongly correlated with the pro-autonomy policy preference.

In the first wave of the survey, we also posed a follow-up question about the reasons for autonomy, focusing on the distinction between fiscal autonomy and policy control. For pro-autonomy individuals, respondents chose between two options: "Greater autonomy for Catalonia should imply, most importantly, greater autonomy over the use of Catalan fiscal resources," and "Greater autonomy for Catalonia should imply, most importantly, more control of public policies by the Catalan institutions, with less interference from the central state." Sixty percent chose the "fiscal resources" option, and the rest chose "more control of public policies." The only statistically significant (and positive) covariates for the fiscal resources (vs. public policies) choice are (right-wing) ideology, the wealthiest income quintile, and the third age group (45–54). See Supplementary File Table F1 for regression results.

Figure 1 indicates that female gender is positively correlated with support for autonomy, although the marginal effect is small at around 5 percentage points. The figure also shows that education, unemployment, and income levels surprisingly do not differentiate territorial preferences. Older individuals (45+) are more likely

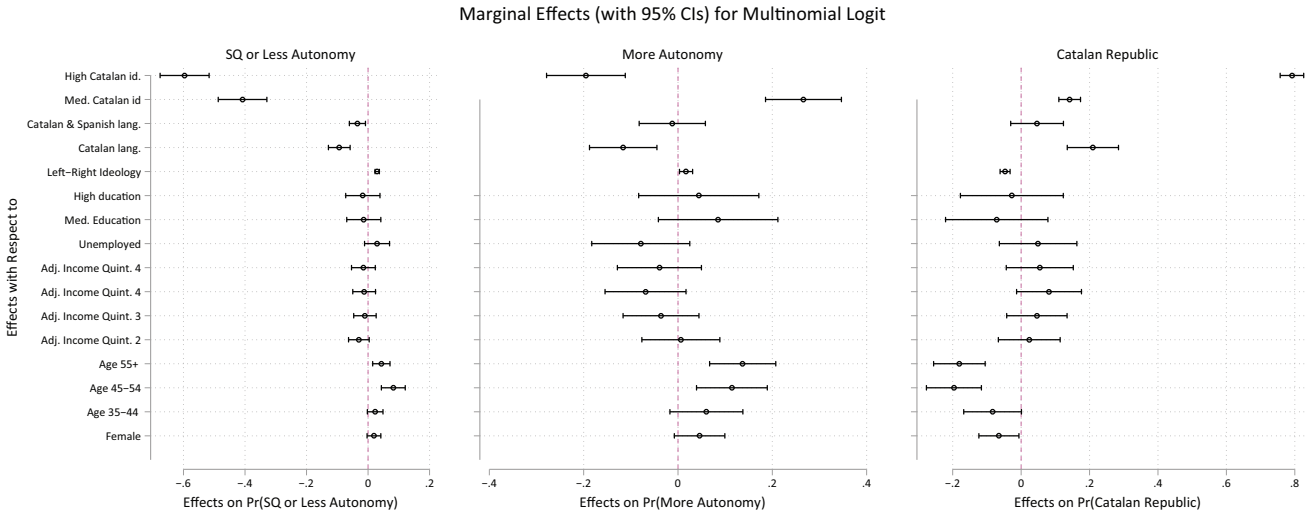

Figure 1. Correlates of territorial preferences: Multinomial logistic regression marginal effects (wave 1).

to support autonomy relative to the other two territorial positions. Ideology is also correlated with these preferences; more right-wing individuals are more likely to favor SQ & less autonomy and more autonomy, while more left-wing individuals are more likely to display pro-independence preferences. Catalan speaking individuals and those with greater levels of Catalan national identity are less likely to support autonomy (again, they are more likely to support independence).

5.2. Territorial Preferences and Key Policy Views

Is the preference for greater autonomy (but not independence), particularly during a secessionist escalation, a meaningful one that correlates with obvious "on the ground" government actions? As a partial validation exercise of this preference, in the survey we measured support of a series of salient actions by both the Spanish and Catalan governments during the contentious period of the referendum and the repressive response by the Spanish government, which we have summarized above. We assessed support on a five-point scale for the following government actions (see full wording in Supplementary File, Part B): the unilateral independence referendum of October 1, the actions of the Spanish government on October 1, the declaration of independence by the Catalan government on October 27, the arrest of the two prominent Catalan pro-independence civil-society leaders (Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez, or "Jordis"), the arrest of Catalan politicians who led the independence effort (i.e., the members of the Catalan government at that time), and the passage of article 155 (which imposed direct Spanish government control over the region). While there were other actions by both the Spanish state and the Catalan government during this crucial time, this group of policies constitutes a reasonable summary of the actions of both actors prior to the centrally imposed December 2017 regional election.

Figure 2 shows via "violin" plots the decomposition of support or opposition for the central and regional governments' actions based on the three territorial preferences (these variables capture, on a 1 to 5 scale, the degree of support for the policy). The plots in Figure 2 show very clearly that, for the six policies, pro-autonomy individuals have levels of support largely in between those who prefer the territorial SQ & less autonomy and those who prefer independence, and thus more moderate degrees of support/opposition. If we consider binary support for each of these actions (see Supplementary File, Tables E1 and E2), 39% of the pro-autonomy group supports the October 1 referendum compared to 94% among pro-independence and 6% among pro-status quo individuals. Also, 82% of pro-autonomy individuals oppose the actions of the Spanish government on October 1, compared to 98% of pro-independence individuals. Interestingly, pro-autonomy people are more supportive of the referendum than of the Catalan parliament's declaration of independence, which was politically linked to the referendum. Only 9% of pro-autonomy individuals supported the independence declaration, as opposed to 79% of pro-independence individuals. Indeed, many pro-autonomy people perceived the referendum a legitimate act of self-determination, but did not perceive the declaration of independence as such. This is suggestive evidence that pro-autonomy individuals are more averse to actions and policies that are more extreme.

Figure 3 shows that this pro-autonomy pattern of support/opposition falling in between that of pro-status quo and pro-independence individuals generally holds when controlling for sociodemographic variables. The figure shows, for each of the six government actions, the plotted coefficients from a linear model with the territorial positions and sociodemographic controls. The baseline policy preference is support for independence, so plotted coefficients in either direction of the vertical line indicate greater support or opposition relative to pro-independence individuals. The figure shows that overall, territorial preferences are the most important correlate of views towards these specific government actions. Also, for each government action, the coefficient of pro-autonomy is generally smaller than the pro-SQ coefficient. Figure 3 shows that pro-autonomy individuals are

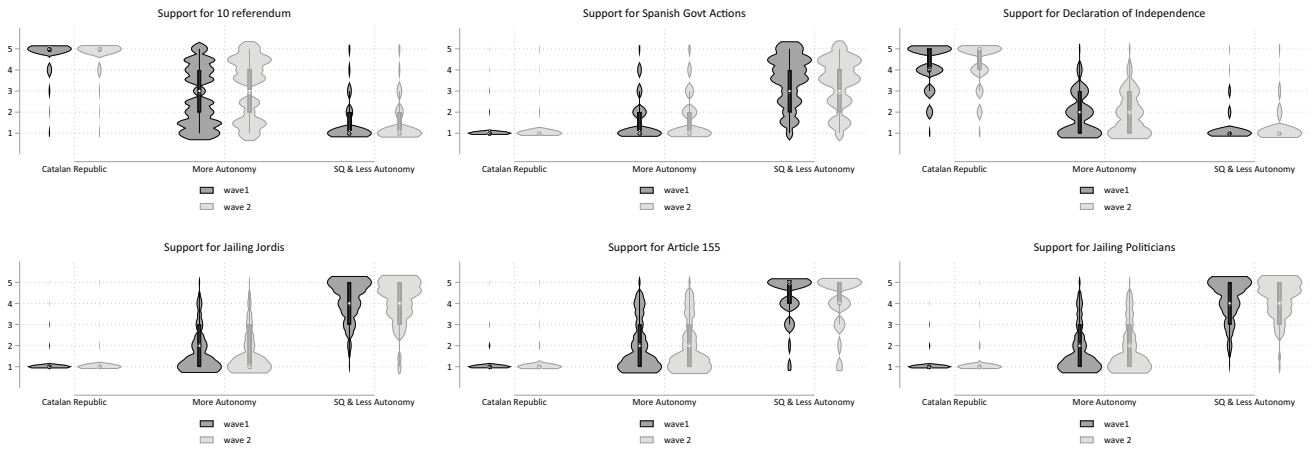

Figure 2. Views on policies by the Spanish state and the Catalan government, by territorial preference (waves 1 and 2).

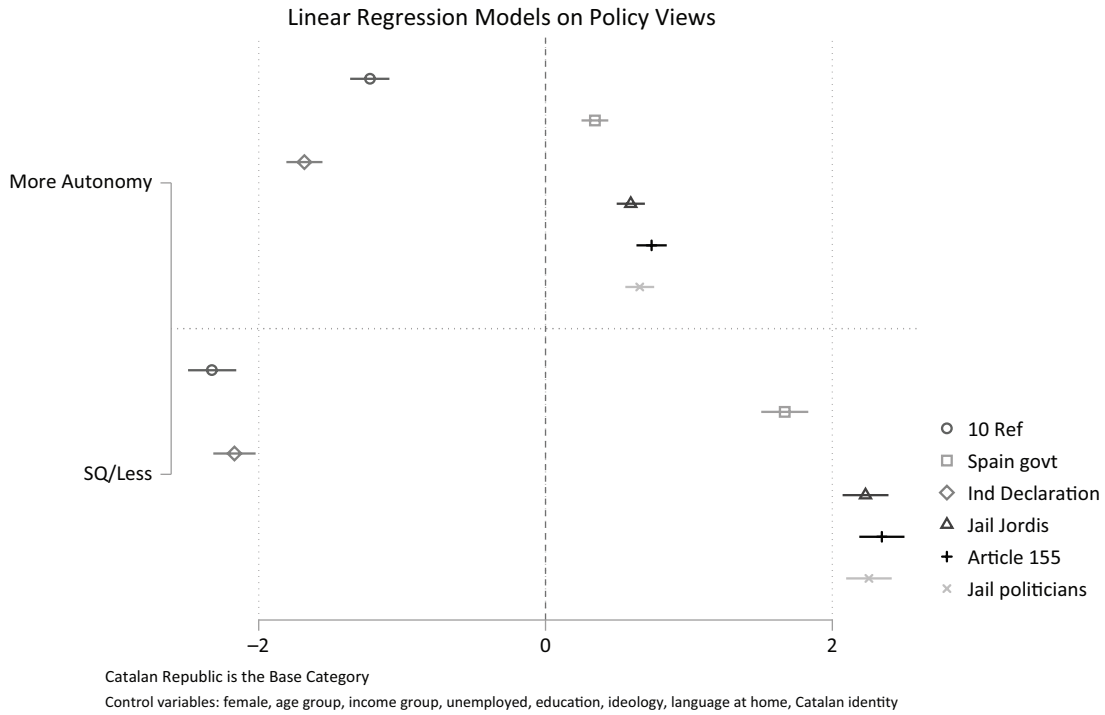

Figure 3. OLS regressions on support for government actions by territorial preferences (wave 1).

closer to pro-independence individuals regarding opposition to the Spanish government's actions (i.e., repressing the vote on October 1, imprisoning social activists and members of the Catalan government, and activating article 155 of the Constitution). At the same time, pro-autonomy individuals are closer to pro-SQ individuals in terms of their opposition to the referendum and the independence declaration by the Catalan parliament. The results in Figures 2 and 3 potentially suggest a difference between views about "process" versus "outcome": While pro-autonomy individuals share some goals with pro-SQ & less autonomy as well as with pro-independence individuals, they have a different vision of how to achieve these goals. With regards to achieving greater self-government for Catalonia, they indicate greater valuing of the existing rule of law (i.e., in not supporting a unilateral declaration of independence); with regards to defending the unity of the Spanish state, a goal they share with the SQ & less autonomy individuals, they value proportionate state action (i.e., they are less supportive of jailing social activists and politicians) and do not support extreme measures such as the suspension of Catalonia's autonomy (i.e., article 155) as much.

In the second wave of the survey, we also asked individuals how much they support or oppose the leaders of the central and regional governments, Pedro Sánchez and Quim Torra, respectively. These results (see Supplementary File, Part E) indicate that pro-autonomy individuals show preferences for these politicians that are closer to the SQ & less autonomy group than to the pro-independence group.

There is also a natural correlation between policy views and partisan preferences. We examine the relationship between territorial preferences and vote choice, measured with a vote-intention question for the December 2017 regional elections (in the first wave) or on hypothetical future regional elections (in the second wave). The results of the linear probability models on vote choice for the main political parties are presented in Figure 4 (1 indicates vote intention for that party, 0 not; the results for the second wave are very similar; see Supplementary File, Figure I1). We observe that those with intermediate territorial preferences resemble status quo individuals in that they are less likely to vote for pro-independence parties (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya [ERC], Junts per Catalunya [JxCat], and Candidatura d'Unitat Popular [CUP]). Unlike the status quo voters, those in the more autonomy category's preferred political party is not Ciudadanos (Cs), but they are more likely to vote for this party than for pro-independence ones. Pro-autonomy individuals are more likely to vote for Partit Socialista de Catalunya (PSC) and En Comú Podem (ECP or Comuns), which have 33 and eight seats, respectively, in the 135 seats of the Catalan parliament (thus, these parties are far from having a majority of the seats, but they hold a non-negligible share of 30%). As compared to pro-independence voters, they are not more likely to vote for Partido Popular (PP), the main Spanish conservative party (currently holding just three seats in the Catalan parliament).

5.3. Emotions and Territorial Preferences

Another key facet by which pro-autonomy individuals might differ from those with other territorial preferences concerns emotions about the political context.

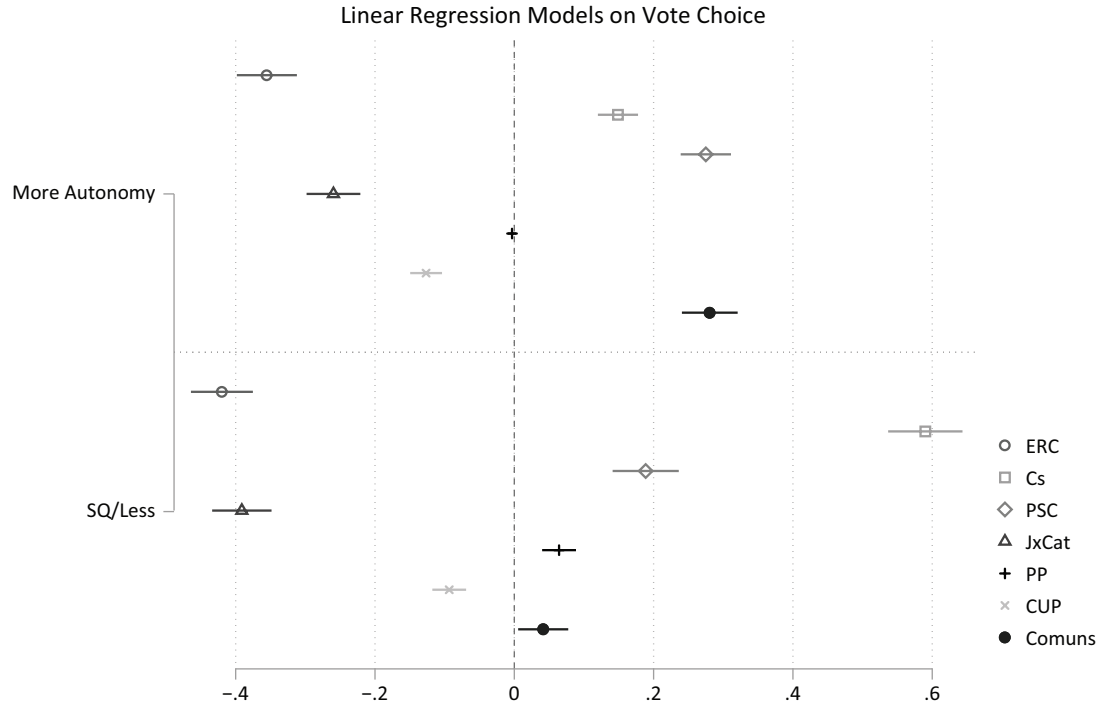

Figure 4. OLS regressions on vote choice by territorial preferences (wave 1).

Such differences are relevant, as political parties or the media may use various frames or campaigns to sway emotions, particularly in the wake of potentially traumatic or salient events such as a unilateral referendum and its crackdown and protests (Balcells, Dorsey et al., 2021). We measured emotions about the political situation in both waves, using standard questions (following Watson & Clark, 1988) about positive emotions (of feeling determined, enthusiastic, inspired, and proud), and negative emotions (of feeling afraid, ashamed, distressed, irritable, nervous, and upset; see the full wording in the Supplementary File, Part B). We assess on a five-category scale how much the person feels each emotion regarding the political context in Catalonia. In our empirical analyses, we focus on whether the "intermediate" bloc has different emotions from the other two. We find that overall, those supporting more autonomy had similar emotions to pro-SQ & less autonomy individuals, with those supporting independence having different emotions. Figures 5 and 6 display linear regressions of emotions on territorial preferences, controlling for sociodemographic covariates (Figures A2 and A3 in the Supplementary File depict these patterns with descriptive "violin" plots). These figures show the marginal effects relative to the baseline of pro-independence individuals. Figure 5 shows that, in December 2017, pro-autonomy individuals felt substantially more ashamed and slightly more afraid than pro-independence individuals. Moreover, Figure 6 shows that pro-autonomy individuals felt less of all four positive emotions than this baseline group, and that the magnitude of these coefficients is similar in point estimates to

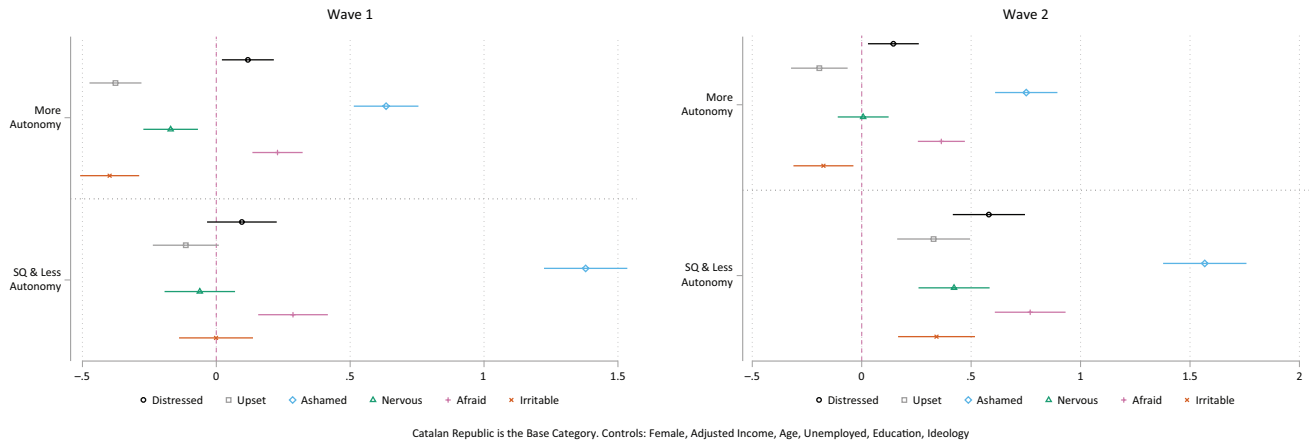

Figure 5. OLS models on negative emotions. Coefficients for territorial preferences.

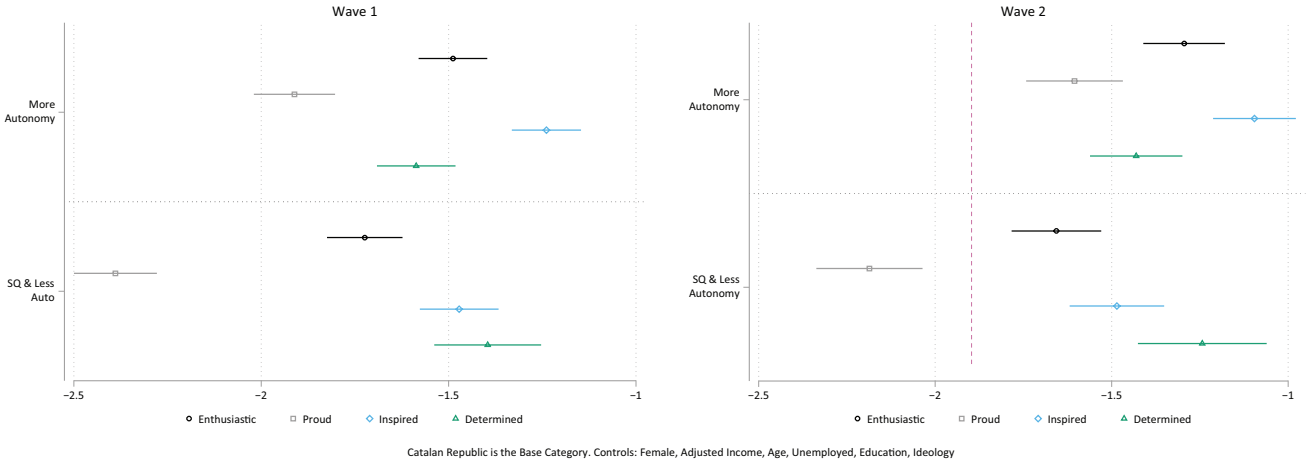

Figure 6. OLS on positive emotions. Coefficients for territorial preferences.

that of pro-SQ individuals. Thus, pro-autonomy Catalans were not particularly positive about the political context in the wake of the independence bid by the Catalan government and its crackdown by the Spanish government.

In the Supplementary File, we present the results of sentiment analyses, using the text in an open-ended question included in each of our surveys, which show that those with intermediate territorial preferences express different sentiments than those in the two extremes. In general, these individuals show more moderate sentiments, for both positive and negative affect. One interpretation of these results is that by having less intense sentiments about the political context, pro-autonomy individuals might be less susceptible to political entrepreneurs who try to sway emotions.

5.4. Territorial Preferences and Government Trust: Evidence From a Survey Experiment

Are pro-autonomy individuals different in how they might trust the regional versus central governments regarding the territorial issue? Is such trust stable? The territorial conflict in Spain is partially defined by commitment problems between the majority group and the minority groups, which are represented by the central government and the different regional governments, particularly those with substate national groups aiming for more self-government (Amat & Balcells, 2021; Requejo et al., 2020). Given that a possible resolution to the territorial conflict involves an agreement between regional and central governments, ideally solving the commitment problems between them—and quite particularly limiting potential agreement defections, we explore the correlation between territorial preferences and trust in the different governments abiding by the terms of an agreement. In our second survey wave, we examined whether trust in the Catalan versus Spanish governments, in a hypothetical situation of agreement, differs by territorial view. We also assess susceptibility to order effects of being asked about trust in the (Catalan or Spanish) government, which is a simple way of testing whether positive/negative priming of trust in one authority affects trust in the other. Our focus is on whether pro-autonomy individuals trust both governments more so than other individuals, and if they differ in sensitivity to trust priming.

Figure 7 presents a plot with the relationship between trust in both governments and territorial preferences, which pools the preferences of those in the treatment and control groups. We observe that pro-autonomy people are those more likely to trust both governments quite similarly, pro-independence people are more trusting of the Catalan government and pro-SQ & less autonomy people are more trusting of the Spanish government. This relative distrust in the "other" government abiding by a territorial agreement is a good illustration of the commitment problem underlying the territorial conflict(s) in Spain, which seems to be less salient among those with intermediate territorial preferences. Pro-independence individuals show the biggest gap in trust between the two governments.

It is beyond the scope of this study to assess the commitment problem theory or other underpinnings of relative trust in governments abiding territorial agreements. Also, we deliberately do not specify the terms of such an agreement in the survey question; some respondents may conflate trust with support for such an agreement (for example, an agreement encompassing the possibility of a self-determination referendum is different from an agreement without such a provision). Yet, these findings are relevant insofar as they show that there are differences in trust in the different governments across territorial preference groups.

The results of the survey experiment are also quite illustrative of the divergence in trust across groups. As a reminder, the treatment in the embedded experiment was the order in which the government's trustworthiness (Spanish or Catalan) was asked about. This is a standard priming experiment embedded in a survey, where the treatment is reversal of order of a question

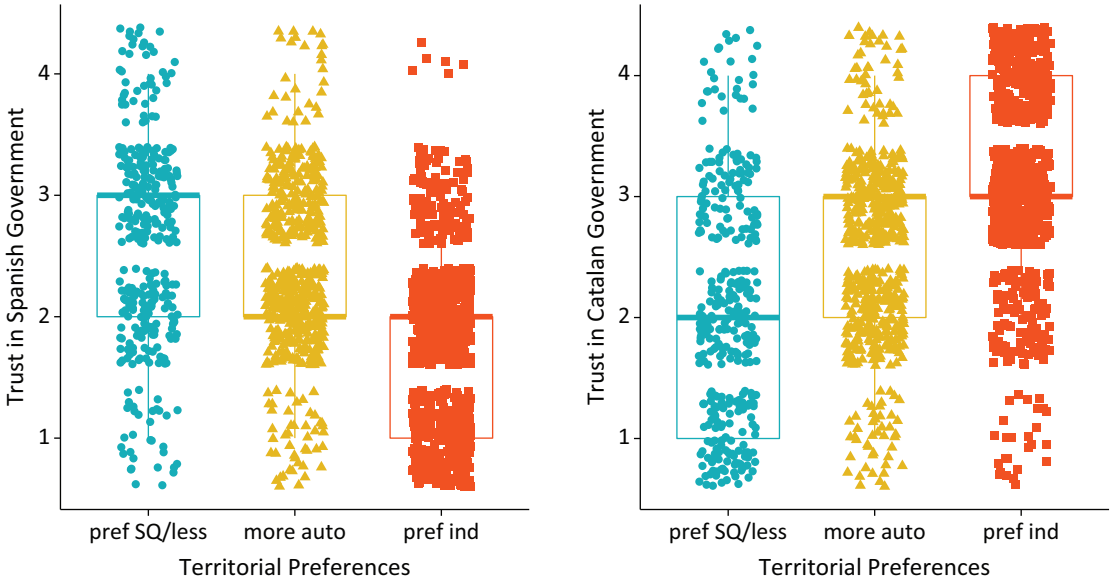

Figure 7. Trust in Catalan and Spanish governments abiding by an agreement, by territorial preferences.

or set of questions (e.g., Sniderman et al., 2004). This allows us to examine whether responses are primed by random assignment of consideration of specific issues (in this case considering trust in the regional government). The text of the question was as follows, with the slash indicating the alternative identity of the government randomized (half the respondents received the Spanish-Catalan order; the other half received the Catalan-Spanish order): "Suppose that the Spanish government and Catalan government were to reach a long-lasting agreement about the political future of Catalonia. How much do you trust the [Spanish/Catalan] government to abide by the terms of such an agreement?" The response options were: strongly trust, somewhat trust, somewhat distrust, strongly distrust. The follow-up question, with the same response options, read: "And how much would you trust the [Catalan/Spanish] government to abide by the terms of such an agreement?"

We label the "control" group as those asked about trust in the Spanish government first, and the "treatment" group as those asked about trust in the Catalan government first. Our main quantities of interest are how relative trust in the different governments under an agreement scenario varies by territorial preference, and whether such preferences moderate susceptibility to order effects. The treatment group in this design is simply whether they are assigned to assess trust in the Catalan government prior to that of the Spanish government (so, again, "treated" respondents are primed to assess trust in the Catalan government first). Interestingly, within the baseline "control" condition, only 35% strongly trust or somewhat trust the Spanish government to abide by an agreement, while 63% strongly or somewhat trust the Catalan government to do so.

To account for possible systematic differences in levels of trust, we measure relative trust in the governments: We rescale both trust measures, take the difference, and rescale the trust-difference in a 0–1 scale so that higher values indicate more trust of the Catalan government relative to the Spanish government (a value of .5 indicates equivalent trust of both institutions to abide by an agreement). The average value of this rescaled trust within our artificially labeled "control" condition is .59. Within this group, 53% have the same level of trust both governments, 40% trust the Catalan government more so, and 7% trust the Spanish government more (note, this could mean that a person somewhat distrusts the Spanish government but strongly distrusts the Catalan government). Those who support independence have a relative trust score of .68; those who support autonomy have a trust measure of .51, and those who support the SQ & less autonomy have a score of .49. Thus, consistent with Figure 7, those who are pro-independence are much more trusting of the Catalan government vs. the Spanish government.

We now turn to the effect of the treatment condition (being asked about trust in the Catalan government first). For pro-independence and pro-SQ supporters, asking about the Catalan government first affects trust in expected directions. Pro-independence individuals trust the Catalan government more in the treatment versus the control condition (.76 vs. .68, $p < .001$). Moreover, pro-SQ individuals' relative trust in the Spanish government is higher in the treatment condition (.33 vs. .48, $p < .001$). Thus, the simple act of priming assessment of the Catalan government first has a significant polarizing effect. When primed this way, pro-independence people are more relatively trusting of the Catalan government, and pro-SQ people are more trusting of the Spanish government. However, pro-autonomy individuals are basically *not affected* by the treatment (.53 vs. .51, $p < .05$); the confidence intervals between the control and treatment groups overlap with zero. For the pro-autonomy group, the relative trust in the governments

is in between that of those with other territorial preferences and there is no main effect in the treatment (.60 vs. .59, p = .27). Figure 8 shows the plotted predicted probabilities from an OLS model controlling for the key sociodemographic variables (i.e., gender, education, employment status, household income, and Catalan origins). The figure shows that the pro-autonomy individuals' relative trust remains the same, whereas individuals with other territorial preferences are primed in opposite directions (see Supplementary File, Table G1, model 4, for the full regression results, where the coefficient of interest is the interaction term between treatment assignment and territorial preference).

Overall, within the "control group," pro-independence individuals trust the Catalan government more than the Spanish government, but pro-autonomy and pro-SQ individuals' trust in the Catalan government is fairly equivalent to that of the Spanish government. However, pro-autonomy individuals are not susceptible to priming effects, whereas individuals on either policy extreme are. In the treatment group, relative trust in the Catalan government is larger for pro-independence individuals while it is smaller for pro-SQ individuals. The above suggests that pro-autonomy individuals may have more stable views on the different actors and outcomes relevant to the resolution of the conflict.

As a final piece of evidence (omitted due to space constraints), in the Supplementary File (Part H), we present additional descriptive findings on social networks that indicate why pro-autonomy individuals may be difficult to persuade (which could indicate one reason for the lack of susceptibility to trust priming). In the survey, we asked people to estimate the percentage of people in their network (relatives and friends) who supported independence. We find that pro-autonomy people are the most balanced subgroup regarding the composition of their social networks; most of such individuals report around 50% pro-independence individuals in their network. By contrast, the other two groups have more imbalanced networks, in that they have greater percentage of like-minded individuals in their networks. The role of social networks on territorial preferences should be further investigated, but we believe that this is consistent with evidence in this article and in other research suggesting a somewhat curbing role of pro-autonomy individuals in the context of political and social polarization around territorial issues (Balcells, Fernández-Albertos et al., 2021).

6. Conclusion

This article has shed light on a subgroup of individuals who, in a secessionist conflict, take intermediate positions between secessionist and pro-status quo views. We used individual-level evidence from the case of Catalonia, where a secessionist drive led by the Catalan government turned into an unprecedented institutional crisis in the fall of 2017. Using data from a two-wave online survey, we analyze the correlates of pro-autonomy views and consider different implications of these preferences regarding key government evaluations, vote choice, emotions, and trust of the Spanish and Catalan governments on a hypothetical agreement to resolve the conflict. The evidence overall suggests that there is a subgroup of individuals who have distinct views from those at the extremes of the territorial

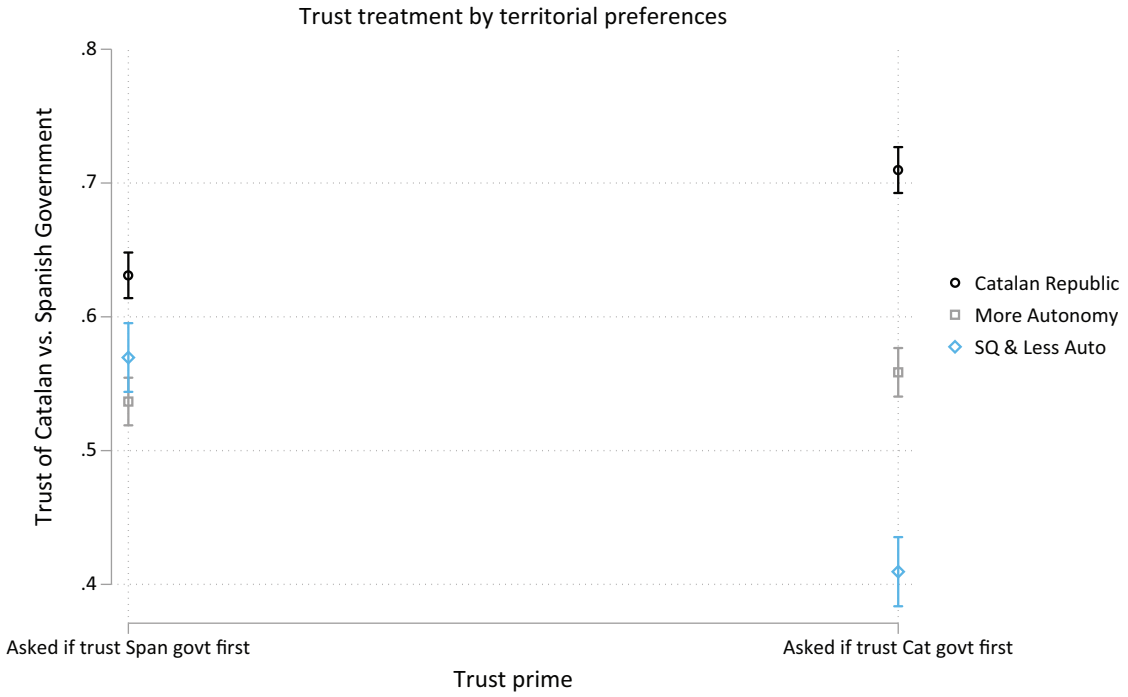

Figure 8. Trust prime experiment results, by territorial preferences.

dimension, but we find limited evidence that standard socio-demographic factors explain this specific preference. There remains only a strong correlation between age and "intermediate" levels of Catalan (vs. Spanish) identity and preference for more autonomy.

Interestingly, the more autonomy group shares with the SQ & less autonomy group some emotions around the conflict and some evaluations of the actions of the Catalan and Spanish governments during the secessionist crisis. This implies that, while this subgroup is probably more sympathetic to independence as a goal than to the SQ & less autonomy (after all, they prefer more powers for the region), this constituency is probably hard to strongly persuade by secessionist actors. For example, pro-autonomy individuals did not feel comfortable around the declaration of independence and other unilateral secessionist actions; as argued above, they seemed to disagree with secessionists on the process more so than on the actual territorial outcomes they were trying to achieve. While they did not agree with some actions of Spanish state actors, more autonomy individuals seem closer in specific policy views to the pro-SQ/less autonomy bloc than to the pro-independence one. Finally, pro-autonomy individuals seem to have less intense sentiments around political issues, be similarly trusting of both Catalan and Spanish governments with regards to a potential negotiated solution to the conflict, and be less affected by trust primes. Our evidence and findings hopefully justify further exploration of these individuals.

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Conflict of Interests

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About the Authors

Laia Balcells is Provost's distinguished associate professor of government at Georgetown University. She is the author of *Rivalry and Revenge: The Politics of Violence during Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Alexander Kuo is an associate professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations, and tutorial fellow at Christ Church, University of Oxford.

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Article

Valence Secession? Voting Shocks and Independence Support in Scotland

Robert Liñeira

School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, UK; E-Mail: robert.lineira@glasgow.ac.uk

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Abstract
National identifications, cues from political actors, and cost-benefit calculations have been pointed as the main determinants of secession preferences. However, a recent surge in independence support in Scotland suggests that abrupt political changes may also affect these preferences: Brexit and the differentiated management of the Covid-19 pandemic by the UK and the Scottish governments are named as causes of the first independence sustained majority registered by polling in Scotland. In this article, I discuss how voting shocks may affect the levels of support for independence, revise the evidence that sustains these claims, and analyse how they have changed the profile of the pro-independence voter. The effect of these questions has substantial implications for a possible second independence referendum in Scotland, as well as for the broader debate on the sources of secession support.

Keywords
Brexit; Covid-19; pandemic; independence referendums; Scotland

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Secessionism in Liberal Democracies: What Do We Really Know About the Explanations of Secessionism?" edited by Ferran Requejo (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain) and Marc Sanjaume-Calvet (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain / Open University of Catalonia, Spain).

1. Introduction

National identifications, cues from political parties and leaders, and cost-benefit calculations have been pointed as the main determinants of individual preferences about secession. These factors tend to remain stable and, with them, preferences about secession. However, independence support has changed dramatically during the last decade in Scotland coinciding with three voting shocks—the 2014 Scotland independence referendum, the 2016 EU membership referendum, and the Covid-19 pandemic—that may have changed not just the levels of support for independence, but also the relationship between secession determinants and secession preferences.

In this article, I assess the determinants of secession support paying special attention to major political events such as the Brexit rupture and the crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, events with the potential to prompt sections of the population to update their views on secession. Brexit can reinforce the idea of a democratic deficit due to the difference in preferences between Scotland and the rest of the UK evidenced by the outcome of the 2016 EU membership referendum, whereas the different handling of the pandemic by the Scottish and UK government may help build support for a valence secession, that is, an independence backing grounded in the view that Scotland would govern itself more effectively as an independent country. Apart from these narratives with a potential direct effect on secession preferences, both shocks can also moderate the effect of secession determinants on secession support.

The article proceeds as follows. First, I present the factors behind secession preferences across sub-state polities and discuss why the changes introduced by Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic may have switched the independence choice of a segment of Scottish voters. Second, I discuss the relevance of the Scottish case and present the data. Third, I assess the effect of the 2014 Scotland independence referendum and the existing evidence on the effect of Brexit and the pandemic on secession support, as well as analyse the change in the profile of the

pro-independence voter. Finally, I discuss the findings' implications for the Scottish case and the broader debate on the individual determinants of secession preferences.

2. Theory

The existence of different national communities and projects is the defining characteristic of multi-national polities where different national identities co-exist. State-wide identities are mainly promoted by central state institutions while sub-state-wide identities are mobilised by sub-state nationalist movements that demand sovereignty in the form of self-government institutions or full secession (Lluch, 2014). The existence of a distinct national identity in a sub-state territory does not necessarily translate into demands for self-government and secession. However, such claims have rarely existed in history without the presence of a distinctive group identity (Sorens, 2005, 2012).

Citizens within the multi-national sub-state territories develop identifications with the alternative national communities. National identifications provide individuals with an affective link to a national community, a sense of belonging, pride, and self-esteem (Tajfel, 1974). These national identifications may be exclusive or nested (Medrano & Gutiérrez, 2001) and may vary in intensity (Hierro, 2012). They are mainly the product of socialisation and past experiences hence they rarely change over short term periods (Dalton, 1999, p. 74; Hierro, 2012). Due to their stability, they constitute one of the strongest determinants of sovereignty preferences in those territories where the national community of reference is a contested and salient issue. Evidence from Quebec (Blais & Nadeau, 1992), the Basque Country (Serrano, 2020), Catalonia (Guinjoan, 2021), and Scotland (Bond, 2015) proves so.

Party cues are the second source of constitutional preferences. Public opinion is cued by political elites and parties constitute the most important political organization that link elites to the people. Decades of research have persistently shown that parties provide citizens with stances and arguments that help them to establish their preferences (Zaller, 1992). Again, the stable nature of parties helps them to perform this role. Unlike more transient elements such as issues and candidates, parties give continuity and structure to the political debate. This enables citizens to develop a lasting bond with some party (or, conversely, an enduring dislike) that acts as a perceptual screen through which they follow the political process (Campbell et al., 1960). In multi-national polities the salience of the constitutional issue affects this partisanship—some individuals select their preferred party because of its constitutional position rather than the other way around—though the exogenous impact of partisanship on secession support is well-established (Clarke et al., 2004; Liñeira & Henderson, 2021). The impact of partisanship on secession preferences is particularly clear in secession referendums when parties and their leaders become one of the main sources of information during the campaign (de Vreese, 2007; LeDuc, 2003).

Cost-benefit calculations constitute the third source of constitutional preferences identified by Hooghe and Marks (2005). Calculations differ in style and mood from enduring predispositions such as national and party identifications: The latter refer to affects and the emotional side of politics, whereas calculations relate to its rational aspect. However, this does not mean that these kinds of thoughts are unrelated. Political psychology shows that individuals frequently engage in motivated reasoning by relying on identifications and emotions to produce arguments that favour the conclusion they want to believe rather than the one that best reflects the evidence (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Redlawsk, 2002).

Economic considerations are the main cost-benefit calculation discussed by the literature on secession. At the macro-level, the relative economic status of the sub-state territory vis-à-vis the whole state determines the economic discourse of sub-state nationalism (Gourevitch, 1979). The dominant prediction is that regions or groups that are better off than the rest of the country will have a higher likelihood of demanding secession (Bartkus, 1999; Hechter, 2000). Two mechanisms would produce this relationship. First, as they often subsidise poorer regions, secession means that more disposable resources would be available due to the elimination of fiscal imbalances (Sambanis & Milanovic, 2014). Second, secession would allow sub-state territories to provide public goods more efficiently since a smaller community translates into an increased homogeneity of preferences (Alesina & Spolaore, 2005).

The impact of cost-benefit calculations on secession preferences is difficult to assess. As mentioned, there is always the possibility that citizens would express a view congruent with their existing preferences when asked about their expectations on the economic consequences of independence, that is, economic expectations could be mere rationalizations of prior preferences (Howe, 1998; Mendelsohn, 2003). However, a survey experiment indicates that economic considerations may play an independent role even if this impact is smaller than the one exerted by national and partisan identifications (Muñoz & Tormos, 2015). Economic considerations are particularly salient to citizens with ambivalent national and partisan identifications (Muñoz & Tormos, 2015), but also to those exposed to economic disruption in the event of secession (Hierro & Queralt, 2021). Even if they are less relevant than other sources of secession preferences, the marginal impact of economic cost-benefit analyses can be crucial when secession is decided in an independence referendum and none of the options shows a clear lead in the polls during the campaign. Different accounts of the independence referendums in Quebec and Scotland point to the economic question as crucial to the final outcome (Blais et al., 1995; Curtice, 2015b).

National identifications, partisanship, and cost-benefit calculations make a comprehensive list of the substantive elements that condition preferences about the territorial constitution across sub-state territories. Other elements, however, may affect the decision to support independence. The literature has particularly underlined the role that individuals' attitudes towards risk play in the choice, particularly when the independence question is determined in a decisive vote. Choosing a ballot involves gambling on what is offered and promised with that option, hence the individuals' attitudes towards taking risks can affect the vote choice, particularly when the stakes are high.

Independence referendums are salient votes that inevitably propose a change of uncertain consequences. The independence decision is a high-stakes one because it has comprehensive consequences for the political system. It affects the borders of the polity and the boundaries of the political community; it implies drafting a new constitution and introducing changes to the institutional regime; it will probably affect the party system and the politics of the sub-state territory. The saliency of the issue facilitates that the voter becomes familiar with some of these questions, but uncertainty is prominent and unavoidable. First, because the electorate can rely on few precedents since independence referendums are rare in the context of consolidated democracies. Second, and most importantly, because independence specifics depend on post-referendum negotiations between the government of the seceding state and the government of the host state, the outcome of which is unknown before the vote.

Faced with uncertain outcomes, risk-averse voters may disproportionally lean against change, creating a powerful advantage for the status quo (Berger et al., 2000; Christin et al., 2002). At elections, risk-averse voters avoid candidates with ambiguous issue positions (Tomz & Van Houweling, 2009), challengers that face experienced incumbents (Eckles et al., 2013; Morgenstern & Zechmeister, 2001), and candidates who argue for a departure from the status quo (Kam & Simas, 2010). It is not surprising, therefore, that opposition to independence is higher among risk-averse voters (Liñeira & Henderson, 2021; Nadeau et al., 1999). Risk attitudes particularly affect the vote choice of those less politically aware and, hence, more uncertain about the consequences of secession (Liñeira & Henderson, 2021).

These four types of considerations—national identifications, partisanship, cost-benefit economic calculations, and attitudes towards risk—constitute the fundamental equation that explains secession preferences across sub-state territories. It is mainly through changes in any of these factors—either a change in their aggregate levels or a change in their relationship to secession support—that we should expect a surge or a decline in the support for independence. These factors do not change easily so stability is the norm. In Scotland, secession preferences seemed to have stabilized after the shock produced by the 2014 independence referendum, but a recent surge in independence support suggests that two new external shocks may affect secession preferences: Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Electoral shocks have been recently defined as major political events that have the potential to prompt large sections of the population to update their political evaluations and party preferences (Fieldhouse et al., 2019). According to Fieldhouse and collaborators, electoral shocks have three characteristics: (1) They represent a sharp and often unanticipated change to the status quo outside the normal course of politics; (2) they are highly salient and manifest over prolonged periods, so they have the potential to be noticed and recognised even by people who are uninterested in politics and by those who might otherwise select into information that fits their partisan predispositions; and (3) they are politically relevant and have the potential to change how parties are perceived, the people's vote and the party system. Though electoral shocks might not have major consequences, they should be able to produce political change in the short and long term.

This conception of electoral shocks can be used to include all external events that affect issues such as secession that may be relevant not just for elections and party politics, but also for other kinds of votes such as referendums. I will refer to events such as Brexit and the pandemic as voting shocks. The mechanisms by which these voting shocks led to secession preference switching may vary. Fieldhouse et al. (2019) identify three ways in which they can affect the vote: They can either change the perceptions of competence, the salience of issues and dimensions, or the image of the parties. I will now discuss the potential mechanisms by which Britain's exit of the EU and the pandemic may have a direct or a moderator effect on secession preferences.

EU membership is a position issue orthogonal to the question of Scotland's independence. There is no logical connection between the two issues: A person can support or oppose independence combined with being in favour or against EU membership. When voters in Scotland went to the polls to give their verdict on independence in 2014, their view about EU membership made little difference to how they voted: Those who were sceptical about Britain's membership of the EU were no more or no less likely than those who were more sympathetic to the organization to vote Yes (Curtice, 2015a).

Brexit potentially changes this. It is a major political rupture that taps onto several secession determinants that may affect the individual's position on secession. First, independence out of the EU affects the cost-benefit calculations of independence. The direction of the effect depends on the general economic impact of Brexit and may vary across individuals depending on their skills and the sector in which they are employed—more skilled workers and those occupied in sectors specializing in foreign markets are more affected by the decision to close the UK economy. Second, the economic consequences

of Brexit are uncertain which may affect the secession preferences of risk-averse voters. These two mechanisms would modify the impact of some of the secession determinants mentioned before.

However, Brexit also affects sovereignty narratives which constitutes a distinct mechanism with a direct effect on secession preferences. Scotland voted in favour of staying in the EU in the 2016 referendum by 62 per cent, but it ended up out of the EU because leaving the EU won in the UK as whole. Scotland's wishes were overturned by the prevalent views in the rest of the UK. As such, the historic "democratic deficit" which had ultimately entrenched support for a distinct Scottish Parliament in the 1980s and 1990s (Paterson et al., 2001) could now translate into a new reason to support independence, producing a surge in secession support.

The other electoral shock came later with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which immediately became the main political issue. Unlike the EU membership divide, the pandemic is a valence issue: Rather than stances on different policy goals, the Covid crisis involves judgements about how effectively the different parties pursue the widely accepted goal of halting the spread of the virus while minimising the economic consequences. It is a salient issue with the potential to affect secession determinants and secession preferences in Scotland.

The effects of the pandemic on secession preferences may also be direct and indirect. Indirect effects include the moderation role that the Covid-19 crisis might have had on the relationship between secession determinants and secession preferences. For instance, Covid can change people's expectations about the economic consequences of independence and other types of cost-benefit calculations. However, the multilevel nature of the UK government also taps into a dimension that potentially has a genuine and direct effect on secession views: The pandemic has highlighted the capacity of the Scottish government to make different decisions in a devolved area of jurisdiction, with the Scottish government following a strategy that seemed to privilege health considerations which contrasted with the UK government strategy that seemed to favour the economy. As we will see, the Scottish public perceived such a difference and was closely aligned with the strategy pursued by the Scottish government. Unlike other policy divergences between the Scottish and UK governments such as university tuition fees and prescription charges (Curtice, 2006), this one affects a highly salient issue, one that has the potential to create the view among the public that Scotland would have governed itself more effectively as an independent country. As such, it constitutes an alternative potential driver of secession preferences.

3. Data and Method

The 2014 Scottish independence referendum is an exemplary and prototypical case of the rare phenomenon of votes to secede from a consolidated democracy. Despite their long history—the first reference to an independence referendum dates back to the 14th century (Mattern, 2019, p. 37)—and the fact that they have been widely used in the case of secession (Qvortrup, 2014, pp. 56–58), independence referendums in established democracies such as the Quebec and the Scotland votes are rare. Even within this tiny category, the Scotland referendum stands out as exceptional. The questions asked in the 1980 and 1995 Quebec votes were ambiguous, and though the Canadian government participated in the campaigns, the legitimacy of the votes was questioned. By contrast, the Edinburgh Agreement between the UK and the Scottish governments allowed a referendum process with no legitimacy queries. It also resulted in a very clear referendum question—"Should Scotland be an independent country?"—and a clear decision rule: Independence or union would be decided by plurality vote.

The 2014 Scottish campaign was dominated by sovereignty and economic concerns. The pro-independence campaign framed independence as an opportunity to pursue policy goals without the interference of the UK government based in London, allowing the Scottish government to pursue left-of-centre policies that reflect the pro-social justice values that are often perceived by Scots themselves to distinguish the Scottish electorate from the UK one (Henderson, 2014). The efficiency argument and the more disposable resources claim were also used: Independence would allow Scotland to follow strategies that suited its needs and retain oil revenues (Scottish Government, 2013). By contrast, the pro-union campaign warned that independence would end the currency union and the financial support of the Bank of England. It suggested that Scotland might not be able to join the EU or, if it became a new EU member, would be forced to join the Euro. It also argued that independence would damage the Scottish economy and finances (Keating, 2017).

I will use two survey projects to analyse secession preferences in Scotland. First, the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSAS). It is a cross-sectional study particularly suited to analyse long-term trends because it has been tracking political attitudes yearly since 1999. It contains a five-option question on different constitutional alternatives that has been asked regularly throughout the two decades of devolution. Second, the British Election Study Internet Panel (BESIP), which contains a large Scottish sample and a specific module of questions (Fieldhouse et al., 2020). As a panel survey, it is particularly suited to analyse short term changes such as the one produced by the pandemic outbreak.

4. Evidence

4.1. The Impact of the 2014 Independence Referendum

The 2014 independence referendum broke the Scottish politics mould. The campaign legitimised the option of

independence and mobilised unprecedented numbers of people behind a previously minority cause (Henderson & Mitchell, 2018). As a result, the Scottish electorate realigned around the independence issue. Since the referendum, the Scottish National Party (SNP) near-monopoly over Yes voters has delivered a series of electoral victories at Westminster and Holyrood alike, largely at Scottish Labour's expense. The Scottish Conservatives have also benefitted. Their unionist credentials place them as the best agent to resist the SNP's separatist aspirations. They have become the official opposition at Holyrood in 2016 (Johns & Mitchell, 2016) and 2021.

This realignment and its impact on the relationship between secession determinants and secession preferences is summarized in Table 1. It shows the percentage of support for independence before and at the end of the referendum campaign, by the three main determinants of secession preferences: national identifications, partisanship, and perceptions of the economic consequences of independence. The pattern is clear: The referendum debate made the relationship between national identity and independence support much stronger. Those who identify themselves as only Scottish and more Scottish than British increased their support for independence, whereas the other identity groups showed little change, except for the small group of those who identify exclusively with Britain.

Partisanship and Yes support also reinforced its relationship: Those who identified with the SNP and the Greens increased dramatically their support for independence. The referendum led a significant number of voters to align their Scottish Parliament vote to their position on independence. Before 2014, some voters selected an SNP ballot at Scottish Parliament elections but voted otherwise at UK Parliament elections and did not support independence. A significant amount of them switched their support to the SNP at general elections and in favour of secession because of the independence debate. The referendum forced the electorate to choose from a Yes and a No vote for independence, breaking the traditional mould of Scottish politics. The alternation between Labour and SNP as the largest party at each election level, and the dual voting behind this electoral change, seems now something of the past (Henderson & Mitchell, 2018).

A similar pattern emerges when we analyse the connection between economic calculations and independence support. Before the campaign, those who thought independence would result in a better economy were less inclined to support independence than by the end of the campaign. The main effect of the campaign was not one of persuasion but one of reinforcing the link between attitudes, calculations, and the vote (Curtice, 2015a; Liñeira et al., 2017). As election campaigns frequently do, the referendum campaign provided voters with an opportunity to learn more about the subject and helped them to crystallize their updated views in the ballot box (Erikson & Wlezien, 2012; Gelman & King, 1993).

The referendum also made mainstream the pro-independence choice. Before the referendum, the support for independence fluctuated between 23 and 32 per cent and according to the five-option question

Table 1. Secession determinants and support for independence before and after the 2014 Scotland independence referendum.

	2012	2014	Change
National identity			
Only Scottish	46	60	+14
More Scottish than British	23	43	+20
Equally Scottish and British	11	11	0
More British than Scottish	12	11	−1
Only British	4	10	+6
Party identification			
SNP	57	78	+21
Green	17	44	+27
Labour	15	21	+6
Conservative	5	5	0
Liberal Democrat	9	14	+5
Evaluations of the economic consequences of independence			
A lot better	78	88	+10
A little better	46	81	+35
No difference	32	35	+3
A little worse	10	11	+1
A lot worse	4	3	−1

Notes: Independence support is measured using the five-option question on constitutional preferences, not the binary referendum question; data for 2012 were collected between July and October 2012, while those for 2014 were collected between May and August 2014. Source: SSAS (ScotCen Social Research, 2013, 2016).

on constitutional preferences asked between 1999 and 2012 by the SSAS (Curtice, 2015a). Figure 1 shows the evolution of independence support since 2013, when commercial polling started to gather data using the binary question used in the 2014 referendum. From 2013 to referendum day, independence showed a steady rise that was particularly acute during the last weeks of the campaign (Liñeira et al., 2017, p. 169; McGann et al., 2019, p. 54). The rise was fed by undecideds disproportionally leaning to Yes and, to a lesser extent, by former No voters persuaded to change.

After the independence referendum, the gap between No and Yes closed marginally, but Yes was never ahead. The EU membership referendum did not change this. Despite the collective will of Scotland being defeated in the Brexit referendum, Figure 1 does not show a remarkable change in the aftermath of the EU referendum. Actually, the gap in favour of No increased during the months after the Brexit vote. The 2017 general election resulted in a hung Parliament that was unable to build a majority for a withdrawal agreement with the EU or any alternative course of action. The stalemate intensified the debate about Brexit and the issue came to dominate the UK's political agenda.

Before the 2019 general election—that crystalized the expected Conservative majority—opinion polls had already shown a rise in independence support. The gap between No and Yes closed in the summer of 2019 (Curtice, 2019), but it was only in the summer of 2020, after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, that Yes became ahead in the polls. Autumn 2020 registered the highest support for independence ever: Polls put Yes up to 58 per cent, with average support of 54 per cent (Curtice, 2020). Polls from early 2021 still place Yes ahead, though its support slightly declined jointly with the speedy UK vaccine rollout programme (Curtice, 2021).

4.2. The Impact of the Brexit Referendum

Though the EU membership referendum did not immediately change the aggregate support for Scotland's independence, it changed the nature of the independence debate (Curtice & Montagu, 2020). Since 2016 the debate on secession has come to be framed as a choice between an independent Scotland that would be aiming to re-join the EU and a Scotland that is part of a UK out of the EU. This would seem to encourage voters to compare what they think would be the consequences of independence with what they consider will happen as a result of leaving the EU.

Though the Brexit referendum did not boost support for independence, there were indications that the Europhile and the pro-independence outlooks were bundling together. Following Phillips et al. (2018,

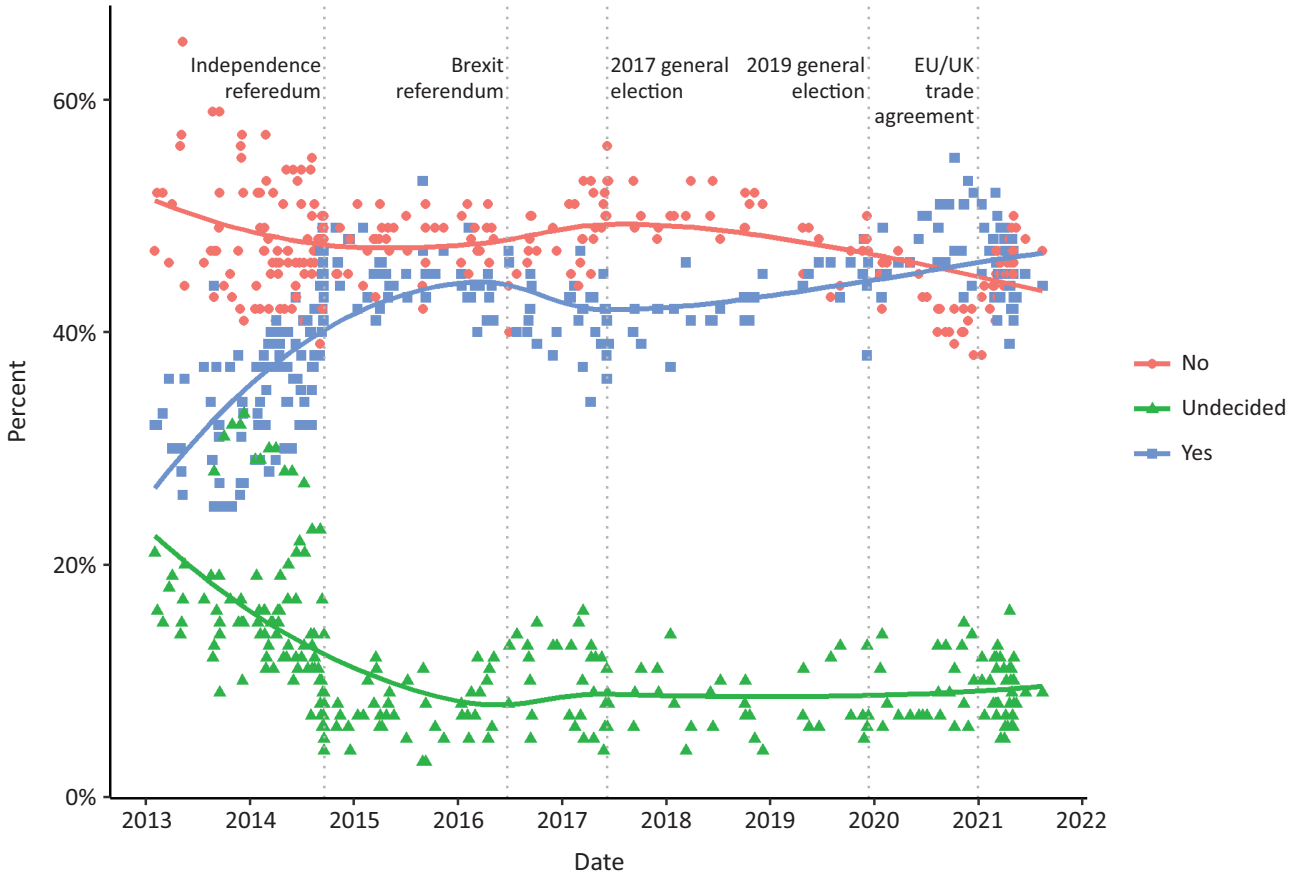

Figure 1. Independence voting intentions in Scotland, 2013–2021. Source: What Scotland Thinks (n.d.).

pp. 196–225), Figure 2 classifies respondents into Eurosceptics and Europhiles and tracks their respective support for independence. Before the referendum, both groups showed very similar levels of independence support. However, a gap opened in 2016 and it has widened every year since.

Initially, Brexit produced changes in secession preferences of similar size that cancelled each other. The switch to pro-independence positions by some of those who voted Remain was initially counterbalanced by increased opposition to secession among those who voted Leave (Curtice & Montagu, 2020; Fieldhouse et al., 2019, pp. 153–161). Brexit cross-cuts the independence referendum debate creating four constitutional groups: Yes/Remain, Yes/Leave, No/Remain, and No/Leave (Mitchell & Henderson, 2020). According to the latest BESIP wave, the No/Remain is the largest one—the group that represented the status quo until the UK left the EU in 2020—with 38 per cent. Unsurprisingly, given Scotland's sizeable Remain majority at the 2016 EU referendum, Yes/Remain is the second-largest constituency, with 24 per cent of the electorate, followed closely by the No/Leave group that comprises 23 per cent of the electorate. Finally, the smallest group is the Yes/Leave constituency which gathers 13 per cent of the electorate.

The current configuration of this cross-constitutional cleavage leaves two of these groups in contradictory positions. Whereas the Yes/Remain group is mainly represented by the SNP and its independence within the EU project, the Scottish Conservatives stand for the No/Leave constituency with its proposal of a UK union out of the EU. The other two groups are unrepresented by the current political landscape and their members may feel forced to choose between their position on Scotland's secession and their EU membership stance. Table 2 shows the voting intention for independence of these four groups in June 2020. The data show no contradiction in the Yes/Remain and the No/Leave groups: They show overwhelming loyalty rates to their secession preference of 83 and 86 per cent. Loyalty rates are, however, weaker in the cross-pressured groups: Around 1 out of 4 have switched to the other side of the independence debate in the Yes/Leave and No/Remain groups. This defection rate, plus the fact that the latter group is the largest constituency, is behind the pro-independence surge shown in Figure 1.

4.3. The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Table 3 shows the public's judgment on the handling of the first wave of the pandemic by the Scottish and British governments. The data show a huge difference in the assessments. Only 19 per cent of the Scottish public thought that the UK government had handled the pandemic very or fairly well, whereas a clear majority of 63 per cent had a negative view. By contrast, the Scottish government handling received more positive judgements: 58 per cent valued it positively and only 23 per cent had a negative assessment.

During the first weeks of the pandemic, there was a heated debate about a potential trade-off between taking decisions prioritizing health or the economy. Faced with a pro-health vs. a pro-economy dilemma, the Scottish public thought that their pro-health stance was much better represented by the Scottish government.

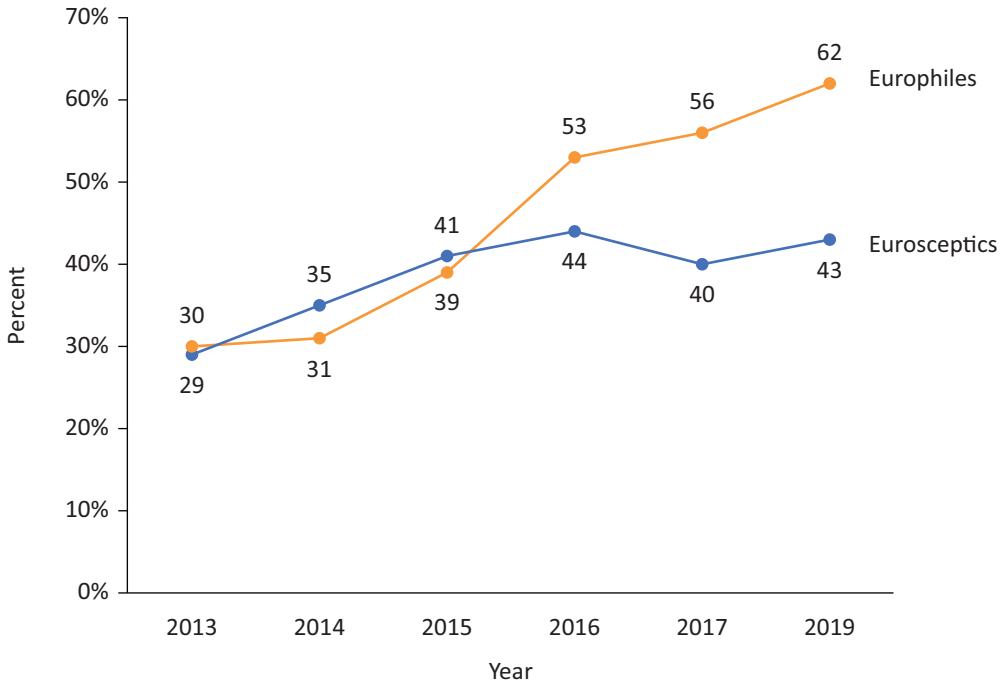

Figure 2. Independence support of Europhiles and Eurosceptics, 2013–2019. Source: Curtice and Montagu (2020, p. 17).

Table 2. Independence vote intention by constitutional preferences, 2020.

	Yes/Leave	No/Remain	Yes/Remain	No/Leave
Yes	60	23	83	8
No	27	64	9	86
Abstain/Do not know	14	14	7	6
(N)	(324)	(862)	(606)	(446)

Note: Scottish respondents only. Source: BESIP, wave 20—June 2020 (Fieldhouse et al., 2020).

Table 3. Perceptions of handling of the coronavirus crisis by the UK and Scottish governments.

	How well has the UK Government handled the coronavirus outbreak?	How well has the Scottish Government handled the coronavirus outbreak?
Very well	2	20
Fairly well	17	39
Neither well nor badly	15	17
Fairly badly	24	13
Very badly	39	10
Do not know	2	2
(N)	(1,214)	(1,201)

Note: Scottish respondents only. Source: BESIP, wave 20—June 2020 (Fieldhouse et al., 2020).

On a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 means to stand for "reduce infections even if it damages the economy" and 10 means "save the economy even if it increases infections," the Scottish public show a mean position of 3.3, that is, the average voter is inclined to the pro-health end of the spectrum. Using the same scale to locate the parties' positions, the Scottish public showed that they had a very different perception of the strategies followed by the government parties in Scotland and the UK. On average, the public placed the SNP at 2.8 on the scale and the Conservative party at 7.1. The party of the Scottish First Minister was much more in tune with the views of the public than the party of the UK Prime Minister.

However, the available data do not show a strong connection between assessments of the coronavirus handling and changing views on independence. Table 4 shows independence vote intentions before and after the pandemic outbreak by the public's view of the Scottish government handling of the pandemics. It shows small increases of Yes vote for all assessment categories except for those that judged the management as "very badly" who, logically, became more reluctant to support independence. The last row of the table reveals that the BESIP did not register a significant increase in support for independence in June 2020: Yes support was only 0.7 percentual points higher than a year before. Two reasons may be behind this lack of change. First, the survey's fieldwork may simply be too early to see the full extent of the coronavirus effect on independence support. By June 2020, Yes had only just begun to creep ahead in the polls.

Table 4. Handling of the coronavirus crisis by the Scottish government and independence voting intentions before and after the pandemic.

	Percentage vote intention for Yes, 2019	Percentage vote intention for Yes, 2020	(N)
Very well	65.5	66.8	(310)
Fairly well	45.2	45.7	(560)
Neither well nor badly	26.0	28.4	(250)
Fairly badly	16.7	17.6	(210)
Very badly	19.6	17.6	(148)
Do not know	23.3	20.0	(30)
Total	39.3	40.0	(1,508)

Note: Scottish respondents that participated in both waves only. Source: BESIP wave 19—December 2019, and wave 20—June 2020 (Fieldhouse et al., 2020).

Most of the rise came later, peaking in autumn. Second, respondents to the BESIP panel are generally highly politically engaged: On average, wave 20 respondents have answered 9 of the 20 waves and show a mean of 6.8 on an eleven-point political engagement scale. They likely have firmer opinions on the independence issue than the Scottish electorate as a whole. The panel may understate the degree of change present in the population over this period.

4.4. The Profile of the Pro-Independence Voter

Table 5 compares the socio-political profile of the independence supporter in 2014 and 2020. Two socio-demographic groups show substantive changes. First, the gender gap has reversed. In 2014, men were more likely to vote Yes than women by 6 percentage points, and other surveys point to even wider differences (Curtice, 2014, 2020). A majority of men supported Yes in 2014, so the No victory appears to rest heavily on the support of women. Women are more risk-averse (Byrnes et al., 1999; Weber et al., 2002), a characteristic that prevents support against uncertain changes (Liñeira & Henderson, 2021; Verge et al., 2015).

Now, the picture appears to be rather different. Women have increased their support for independence by 6 percentage points and men have dropped their support by 7 points. The gender gap has reversed and now women support independence by 5 percentage points more than men. A possible factor behind the reversion is that Brexit changed the perception of where the risk lies. Back in 2014, the independence proposal was perceived as the riskiest option, mainly due to economic uncertainties (Johns, 2016; Liñeira et al., 2017): 59 per cent of Scottish respondents were unsure about what will happen in the event of Scotland's independence, whereas only 31 per cent thought the same about the prospects of Scotland remaining in the UK (BESIP, May–June 2014,

Table 5. Percentage of independence support by socio-demographics, identities, and political preferences.

	2014	2020	Change
Gender			
Women	44	50	+6
Men	52	45	−7
Age groups			
18–24	53	63	+10
25–39	54	59	+5
40–59	50	52	+2
60–64	47	43	−4
65 and over	35	34	−1
Occupation grade			
Higher	45	47	+2
Intermediate	43	44	+1
Lower	52	49	−3
Educational attainment			
Lower than secondary education	46	38	−8
Secondary education	49	46	−3
Higher education	47	52	+5
National identification			
Only Scottish	89	89	0
More Scottish than British	60	63	+2
Equally Scottish and British	19	14	−5
More British than Scottish	12	14	+2
Only British	10	18	+8
General election vote recall			
Conservative	14	6	−8
Labour	42	32	−10
Liberal Democrat	42	17	−25
SNP	85	87	+2
EU membership referendum vote			
Leave/Stay out	42	22	−20
Remain/Re-join	52	63	+11

Note: Independence support is measured through a vote recall question in 2014 and through a vote intention question in 2020. Source: BESIP wave 3—September/October 2014, and wave 20—June 2020 (Fieldhouse et al., 2020).

wave 2). By contrast, uncertainty was on the Leave side in the EU referendum: 38 per cent of Scottish respondents were unsure about what would happen to the UK in the event of Leave, whereas only 23 per cent thought the same about Remain (BESIP, May–June 2016, wave 8).

Meanwhile, the age profile of the pro-independence and pro-union sides works to the advantage of the former. The link between age and independence support is not new: Back in 2014 older cohorts opposed independence, whereas younger cohorts were more divided. Now, support for independence is majoritarian for all groups under 60 years old. Support has particularly increased among people in their teens, twenties, and thirties. The overwhelming support to Remain in the EU by younger cohorts seems the likeliest factor behind this change (Fieldhouse et al., 2019, pp. 163–187). Again, the cross-cutting debates of secession and EU membership have changed the profile of the pro-independence voter.

Independence support by education and occupation levels show smaller amounts of change. However, they significantly changed in the same direction. Education was not a huge differential factor in 2014, but it appears to be now: Those with higher educational attainment have increased their support for independence, whereas the opposite has occurred among those with fewer years of academic education. A similar story, with smaller differences, has happened within the different occupation groups. In 2014, independence only won among those with lower occupation grades according to the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification. In 2020, independence does not win in any occupation groups, but independence support has increased in the higher occupation grades.

National identifications keep being strongly related to independence support, but the direction and strength of this relationship has not changed since 2014. The only remarkable change is related to those who identify with Britain rather than Scotland—a category mainly selected by Scottish residents with English background (Bond, 2000, 2006)—who almost doubled their level of independence support in 2020.

However, the biggest change is related to the growing association between political preferences and independence support. Table 1 shows that the 2014 referendum reinforced the relationship between party choice and independence choice. Table 5 shows that the relationship has become stronger since 2014. It also illustrates the cross-cutting of constitutional debates. Back in 2014, the difference between Eurosceptics' and Europhiles' support for independence was 10 percentage points. Now it is 41 points: 63 per cent of support for independence by those who favour to re-join the EU and only 22 per cent among those who wish to stay out.

5. Conclusions

In this article, I have examined the factors that explain secession preferences in Scotland and how they have been affected by three external shocks: the 2014 independence referendum, the 2016 EU membership referendum, and the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The independence referendum was a critical juncture for Scottish politics. Independence used to be a minority cause and it has become a mainstream option. It transformed the party landscape and made the SNP a dominant force that comes first at both general and Scottish Parliament elections. It also increased the saliency of the independence dimension. This can be observed in the closer alignment between party choice and independence support, but also in the stronger association between secession determinants—such as national identification, partisanship, and economic evaluations—and secession preferences.

Brexit changed the nature of the independence debate. Both debates show similar arguments about the implications of what is proposed for the economy, sovereignty, and influence in the world, and both also touch upon people's sense of identity and how they would like that to be reflected in the arrangements under which they are governed. The two debates were initially separated but they are now intertwined. Back in 2014, there was no significant correlation between the people's position on one issue over the other, but this is not the case anymore. Though it is a far from perfect correlation—there are four distinct electoral constituencies in Scotland that result from the cross-cutting of these two debates—the two issues are not orthogonal: Those who support Scotland's independence tend to favour re-joining the EU. The realignment was evident in 2016, but it was later, when the terms of Brexit became clearer—a UK out of the single market and the customs union—that it started to pay for the independence cause. Much of the rise in independence support that started in the second semester of 2019 draws from those who are favourably disposed towards the EU.

Brexit has therefore weakened the perceived merits of the Union in the eyes of a modest but significant body of voters in Scotland. Remain voters are far from all being advocates of a highly integrated EU, but many view Brexit with concern for the country's prospects and, particularly, the economic future. For some of these voters, independence in the EU looks more attractive than being part of a UK out of the EU. The economic concern that prevented some voters to support independence in 2014 has changed sides to a certain extent. Brexit has also confirmed that Scotland's can be easily overturned by England's electoral will, which has led some voters to embrace the independence project.

However, none of this means that Scotland is now set firmly on a path that will eventually lead to independence. Many of the potential implications of an independent Scotland in the EU while the rest of the UK is outside, ranging from the consequences of a single market border between England and Scotland to the relative merits of easy access to the EU single market as opposed to the internal UK market, have yet to be

debated. These debates may change minds in either direction, as the 2014 referendum campaign illustrates. Brexit has changed the levels of support for secession, but it has also changed the meaning of Scotland's independence: Secession is now a more disruptive project than in 2014 when both England and Scotland were in the EU. The impact of Brexit on Scotland's chances to secede is far from being determined.

By contrast, I did not find strong evidence that the Covid pandemic was behind the last surge in independence support. Covid did not lead the Scottish public to support a valence secession, that is, one based on the view that Scotland would govern itself more effectively as an independent country. It seems that the different handling of the pandemic encouraged a pro-independence surge during the second semester of 2020, but the gap had already narrowed by early 2021. The fact that the pandemic did not produce lasting effects on secession preferences does not deny its nature as a voting shock, though its potential for change seems to have resulted in just a temporary bump on independence voting intentions. If it produced an impact, it was a short term one, and short term impacts only determine referendum results if they happen at the crucial time of an independence referendum campaign.

However, the handling of the pandemic might lead the public to update its view of the SNP, which may have gained a more competent party image as a result. In the short term, this could have facilitated the party's victory in the May 2021 Scottish Parliament elections. In the long-term, it may cement the idea that Scottish governments led by the SNP handle things differently than UK governments. If this should be the case, valence considerations could have lasting implications for both the SNP and its pro-independence project.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Robert Liñeira is lecturer in politics at the University of Glasgow. His research interests deal with public opinion, political behaviour, and direct democracy, particularly on issues related to territorial politics. His work has been published in journals such as *Political Behavior*, *Party Politics*, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* and *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, amongst others.

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Article

The Asymmetrical Effect of Polarization on Support for Independence: The Case of Catalonia

Juan Rodríguez-Teruel * and Astrid Barrio

Department of Constitutional Law, Political and Administrative Sciences, University of Valencia, Spain;
E-Mails: jrteruel@uv.es (J.R.-T.), astrid.barrio@uv.es (A.B.)

* Corresponding author

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Abstract
The article analyses the consequences of elite polarization at the mass level in the centre-periphery dimension. We analyse the rapid rise in support for independence in Catalonia, focusing on the role of party competition around the centre-periphery cleavage. We argue that mainstream actors' adoption of centrifugal party strategies with respect to the national question produced a polarizing dynamic in the party system that eventually caused voters' attitudes regarding the centre-periphery issue to harden. Indeed, we posit that this increase in mass polarization was a consequence of party agency that subsequently helped to drive attitudes regarding independence. To test this hypothesis, we measure centre-periphery polarization (as perceived by voters) by adopting two different perspectives—inter-party distances (horizontal polarization) and party-voter distances (vertical polarization)—and then run logistic regressions to explain support for independence. The findings show an asymmetrical effect on polarization. While the centrifugal strategy implemented by Catalan regionalist parties paved the way for a radicalization of voters on the Catalan nationalist side, among voters for non-regionalist parties, attitudes towards independence were initially less conditioned by this polarization. The results provide evidence of the political effects of elite polarization.

Keywords
Catalonia; independence; party competition; party cues; polarization; secession

Issue
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1. Introduction

How does party politics contribute to increasing support for independence in a democratic country? The literature on secession has tended to emphasize the role of socioeconomic and institutional factors or "preconditions" in explaining demands for independence (Wood, 1981), particularly in countries that have experienced recent processes of decentralization. This perspective usually implies that these demands remain stable over time, as a consequence of ethnic divisions produced in the formation of modern states and the survival of peripheral identities (Flora et al., 2007). However, recent examples of growing calls for independence referendums indicate the relevance of political agency (like leadership or party demands) in these secessionist movements.

In this article, we argue that party competition is a powerful driver of a sudden, rapid increase in secessionist demands among the population (Pagoaga Ibiricu, 2020). In a context where secession was not previously a salient issue and did not enjoy significant support among citizens, the role of party agency may become critical for boosting support for independence when political

parties decide to adopt centrifugal strategies concerning this subject for different reasons. Such centrifugal competition in the centre-periphery cleavage, in combination with other factors, may transform voters' preferences for greater self-government into explicit support for secession. The key driver connecting party competition and changes in ideological attitudes is polarization, defined here as a shift in political attitudes towards more extreme positions (Campbell, 2016; Dalton, 2008; Sartori, 1976).

In this respect, we assume that mass polarization is a possible result of the decisions made by political elites, whereby parties send cues to their voters, frame arguments regarding the political alternatives and define the political agenda (Druckman et al., 2013). The role of polarization in the context of rising secessionism has recently been analysed from the perspective of moderate voters, showing that intense radicalization after a territorial crisis has caused many such voters' attitudes to harden (Guntermann & Blais, 2020). However, we turn our attention to the early stages of a secessionist crisis. Taking the case of Catalonia, we aim to observe the extent to which recent support for secession here (which has traditionally been low) has been affected by the inter-party competition that emerged among Catalan regionalist parties in previous years. Between 2010 and 2012, Catalonia experienced a dramatic increase in support for secession, growing from 15–20% to almost 50%, in the process transforming the political debate around decentralization in Spain and producing a major political crisis that culminated in the events of October 2017, when regional autonomy was suspended after the Catalan government unilaterally declared the region's independence.

Previous studies have shown that the territorial clash in Catalonia was preceded by years of party changes in their position regarding the centre-periphery issue, strategic behaviour, and ethnic outbidding, particularly in the case of Convergència i Unió (CiU), the main regionalist party, which until that point had defended moderate, non-secessionist positions (Barrio & Rodríguez-Teruel, 2014, 2017; Colomer, 2018; Elias, 2015; Elias & Mees, 2017; Miley, 2014). As was also the case in Quebec and Scotland, the result was a growth in party polarization in the centre-periphery cleavage. However, the effects of this polarization were asymmetrical. Rooted in regionalist parties' cues and framing strategies, this polarization made it easier for many regionalist voters to embrace secession. By contrast, non-regionalist parties tempered their initial push for independence from their political adversaries, possibly resulting in a vaguer effect on their voters. Hence, our argument tries to connect this centrifugal party competition with the resulting rise in demand for independence. Therefore, we observe whether voters' perceptions of party polarization affected their support for more radical attitudes regarding the territorial issue. To test this relationship, we analyse political attitudes at the beginning of the crisis in 2012 and observe the effect of polarization on voters' preferences. The results confirm a robust effect in that election, particularly among CiU's voters.

The article is organized as follows. First, we provide some theoretical arguments about party competition and polarization in the context of secessionist movements. Then we sketch the origins of political polarization in Catalonia until 2012, before presenting our hypotheses and variables. The fifth section empirically assesses the consequences of polarization for support for secession. The conclusion discusses the role of polarization in the light of these findings.

2. Secession, Party Competition, and Polarization

2.1. The Role of Parties in Increasing Demands for Secession

When secessionist movements arise, it is typical for there to be many factors pushing in that direction. Early studies on secession and ethnic conflicts highlighted the relevance of regional inequalities in driving demands for self-government (Horowitz, 1985). In addition, most scholars have shown that identity and ethnic divisions are important preconditions for the development of secessionist movements (Bond, 2000), although this relationship is complex and multifaceted (Blais et al., 1992; McCrone & Paterson, 2002; Serrano, 2013). Hence, economic variables only seem to be relevant for pro-secessionist parties when linguistic divisions are involved as well (Álvarez Pereira et al., 2018). In the same vein, political decentralization may incentivize demands for self-government where ethnic divisions are politically relevant (Brancati, 2006; Massetti & Schakel, 2013). Recent studies focusing on economic attitudes have identified the material calculus held by some individuals when considering the effects of secession (Hierro & Queralt, 2021; Muñoz & Tormos, 2015). Overall, these structural explanations help us to understand the formation of secessionist claims and individuals' territorial preferences over time.

However, the evolution of demands for secession is also conditioned by political actors' behaviour. The way in which a state responds to such threats is crucial to determining the latter's success (Griffiths, 2016). More generally, secession may be a rational goal for political leaders seeking office and material benefits (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002; Hechter, 2000). Hence, leaders may send cues to their voters (Muñoz & Tormos, 2015) and use framing techniques to persuade the masses to choose a separatist view as a strategic response to an ethnically charged collective action problem in a union (Hale, 2008). This can pave the way for ethnic outbidding in order to mobilize ethnic groups to favour secession (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972).

The perspective of ethnic outbidding studies brings political parties and party competition to the centre when aiming to explain secession and ethnic conflicts.

As a consequence, it becomes possible to understand the contexts in which regionalist or "ethnonational" parties choose to join a centrifugal dynamic of party competition based on ethnic outbidding (Zuber & Szöcsik, 2015). Territorial or national polarization may be one of the strategies parties use to compete, although their choice also depends on the strategies adopted by their opponents (Pagoaga Ibiricu, 2020). The outbidding thesis has been applied successfully to recent cases of secession crises in Western Europe (Barrio & Rodríguez-Teruel, 2017; Coakley, 2008; Gormley-Heenan & Macginty, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2009; Sanjaume-Calvet & Riera-Gil, 2020).

However, previous studies have tended to fail to empirically show the mechanism linking outbidding competition with the rise in support for secession in the short term. Several scholars have stressed the role of party cues (Bullock, 2020) as mechanisms of opinion formation among poorly informed individuals on complex issues (Hellström, 2008), although the relationship between parties and public opinion may work in both directions: Parties influence voters' attitudes, but they also pay attention to their voters' opinions (Steenbergen et al., 2007).

As a consequence, party polarization may stimulate polarization among voters with respect to specific issues. In this vein, the present article aims to explore whether party-driven polarization regarding the national issue really works in this context as an explanatory driver of increased support for independence, as long as we can observe a distinct effect on national preferences among more polarized individuals.

2.2. The Role of Polarization in Stimulating Demands for Secession

We define polarization as the increase in ideological or policy distance among voters and parties, across the ideological spectrum of any given polity, in such a way as to decisively shape how political forces compete within the party system (Campbell, 2016; Dalton, 2008; Sartori, 1976). Polarization usually denotes, implicitly or explicitly, three different components: an ideological distance among parties, voters, or both; an element of extremism related to the presence of anti-system forces; and parties' internal homogeneity (Schmitt, 2016, p. 3). The most common approach analyses ideological polarization based on inter-party distances in the left–right dimension, although ideological differences may also be measured according to other dimensions and related to specific issues, such as the centre-periphery cleavage (Lauka et al., 2018).

In empirical terms, ideological polarization is usually treated as an aggregated feature of the party system (Dalton, 2008). In order to analyse it at the individual level, we can distinguish two dimensions of elite polarization (Lupu, 2015; Rodríguez-Teruel, 2021). On the one hand, horizontal polarization measures the ideological distances between parties as perceived by each individual, i.e., a voter's perception of the extent of elite polarization. On the other hand, vertical polarization captures the distance between each voter and each party, as perceived by that voter, i.e., how far party elites are from a voter's position. These two dimensions of polarization at the individual level help to better capture how voters perceive party ideological movements (change or stability) as a consequence of political competition.

Polarization between elites and voters may work in either direction. From a spatial perspective, some studies have shown that polarization among voters drives political parties to extremes in an attempt to gain or keep their support (Cox, 1990; Ezrow, 2007). More recent studies have argued instead that party competition may adopt centrifugal dynamics, resulting in a more polarized electorate (Hetherington & Weiler, 2010; Lupu, 2015). Party cues may play a role in this party-driven polarization, following "partisan-motivated reasoning," i.e., the tendency for ordinary citizens to adopt the policy preferences of their closest parties (Bolsen et al., 2014; Druckman et al., 2013). Nevertheless, party identification is not a necessary precondition for individuals to be persuaded by parties, as Guntermann (2017) has shown in the case of Spanish voters regarding the centre-periphery issue. These party cues are particularly likely to affect voters' opinions if an issue is considered salient (Nordø, 2021).

Challenger parties are especially likely to adopt centrifugal strategies to compete with mainstream forces by emphasizing polarizing issues, like immigration or anti-establishment rhetoric (de Vries & Hobolt, 2020; Morales et al., 2015; Szöcsik & Polyakova, 2018). However, mainstream parties may react by choosing similar polarizing strategies, in an attempt to contain their electoral losses (de Lange, 2012; Downes & Loveless, 2018; Rodríguez-Teruel, 2021). As a consequence of this centrifugal competition, voters may adopt clearer positions in those issues emphasized by parties (Bischof & Wagner, 2019), while mainstream parties may have a chance of mitigating their electoral losses because greater party system polarization can reduce party switching (Dejaeghere & Dassonneville, 2017).

What are the consequences of such centrifugal dynamics when political parties compete around the centre-periphery cleavage through ethnic outbidding? Following the cues provided by their preferred parties, those voters with a particularly clear perspective of party distances may adopt less ambiguous positions in their policy preferences. For instance, they may move towards explicit support (in the case of regionalist voters), or alternatively strongly oppose secession (in the case of non-regionalist voters). By contrast, voters who continue to observe minimal distance between parties (or between parties and themselves) may be more sceptical of the consistency or credibility of more radical positions (i.e., support for or opposition to secession) declared by parties. In such cases, the importance of

polarization, among other factors, becomes blurred. This argument departs from traditional accounts of recent Catalan politics that observe political polarization simply as a consequence of the secessionist crisis (Balcells et al., 2021). Instead, we suggest that it was the outcome of previous centrifugal competition and then became a driver of changes in political attitudes and political realignment. Anchoring national polarization as an outcome of built-up political tension is important for our argument, as it helps to avoid potential endogeneity problems in the relationship between polarization and policy preferences. Therefore, before entering into the details of how our expectation can be tested, we will sketch out how centrifugal party competition had produced a context for party polarization and thereby paved the way for strengthening voters' perceptions of polarization around the centre-periphery cleavage.

3. Centrifugal Party Competition in Catalonia Until 2012

Catalonia has often been considered a relevant case study for observing successful decentralization in an old unitarian state or, alternatively, as a case of a threat to national unity in spite of regional autonomy (Colino, 2020; Dowling, 2018). Although the region has been ruled by regionalist parties since the recovery of self-governance, support for secession has traditionally remained relatively weak, below 20%, in contrast to strong positions in favour of the constitutional system of devolved powers, as seen in Figure 1. In spite of this stable support for the status quo, Catalan parties launched a reform of the Statute of Autonomy in 2004, seeking more political and fiscal powers (Gray, 2020). The reform took more than two years and produced a huge political controversy in Spain. Interestingly, during those years the debate around devolution temporarily fuelled support for federalism among a significant proportion of voters, to the detriment of the status quo (Figure 1).

Although the new statute was finally passed via referendum in 2006 with high support but low turnout (in contrast to the previous statute of 1978), the Spanish mainstream conservative party Partido Popular (PP, People's Party) appealed against the text before the Constitutional Court. The Court issued a ruling in 2010 declaring some articles to be unconstitutional. One year later, the Spanish conservatives achieved a big majority in the national parliament. The new executive took a tough position against regional governments and launched a number of attempts to recentralize political power, with the aim of reducing the public budget in response to the Great Recession. In this context, support for secession in Catalonia received a major boost between 2010 and 2012. When asked which relationship with Spain they would prefer, the proportion of individuals in support of secession increased from 20% to almost 50% by the end of 2012, while more than 50% said they would vote "yes" in the event of an independence referendum (Figure 1). This massive switch in favour of secession occurred without significant changes in the traditional factors mentioned above, including identity. So, what happened?

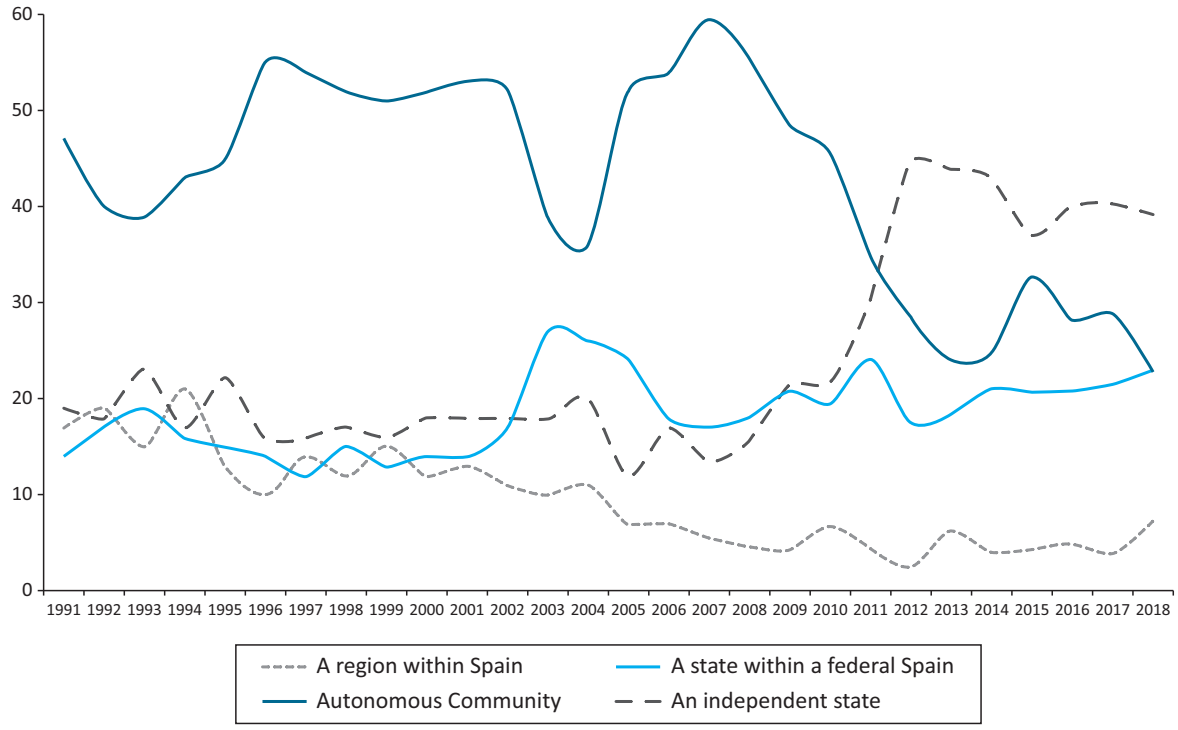

Figure 1. Preferences for models of territorial organization in Catalonia. Source: Authors' elaboration using ICPS's database (https://www.icps.cat).

General accounts of this period usually refer to contextual factors—such as the aforementioned 2010 Constitutional Court's ruling and the Great Recession—as the critical events explaining the rapid growth in support for secession over a short period of time. Academic studies show a more complex perspective, in which identity is the most powerful independent variable, although economic preferences and expectations may also play an additional modest role tied to identity (Muñoz & Tormos, 2015; Rico & Liñeira, 2014; Serrano, 2013). More recently, some studies have highlighted the relevance of competition among regionalist parties in the previous decade as a source of elite polarization preceding the territorial clash (Barrio & Rodríguez-Teruel, 2014; Colomer, 2018; Pagoaga Ibiricu, 2020).

In particular, Barrio and Rodríguez-Teruel (2017, pp. 1783–1785) have identified three stages in the ethnic outbidding launched by these parties. A first step was taken in 2000–2003, when Catalan parties initiated a debate concerning the reform of self-government in the region. This was originally regarded by some parties as a mere reform aimed at updating certain aspects and was quickly accepted by most of them as a potential opportunity to introduce a constitutional change in the Spanish model of decentralization without requiring constitutional reform (Colino, 2009). In reality, however, the debate was instrumental for the opposition in Catalonia to weaken the political collaboration between the Catalan right-wing regional party Convergencia i Unió (CiU, Convergence and Union) and the PP, as both were initially reluctant or opposed to such a reform. The goal was finally achieved in December 2003, when the left-wing opposition parties made an agreement to form a new executive coalition rooted in a pledge to reform the Statute of Autonomy. The second step occurred between 2004 and 2006, when the region's political parties became embroiled in a tortuous process of reform that soon became an outbidding process between CiU—which by this time was part of the opposition—and the pro-secession Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC, Catalan Republican Left), which was in government. Hence, CiU pushed the bargaining of the reform beyond the constitutional limits set by the ruling parties in order to destabilize the ruling cabinet coalition (Keating & Wilson, 2009; Orte & Wilson, 2009). Finally, between 2007 and 2012, CiU and ERC progressively adopted more radical positions in the territorial dimension, becoming more critical of the new statute and more explicitly in favour of an independence referendum in the short term. This turn was particularly overwhelming in the case of Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (CDC, Catalan Democratic Convergence)—the main member of CiU—which in 2012 adopted a pro-secession position. Thus, in a decade the main historically moderate, regionalist political force of Catalonia had moved from pragmatic regionalism to independentism without there being a parallel change in its voters' opinions.

It is important to note that this process of increasing centrifugal party competition in Catalonia was followed by slightly significant changes in the polarization

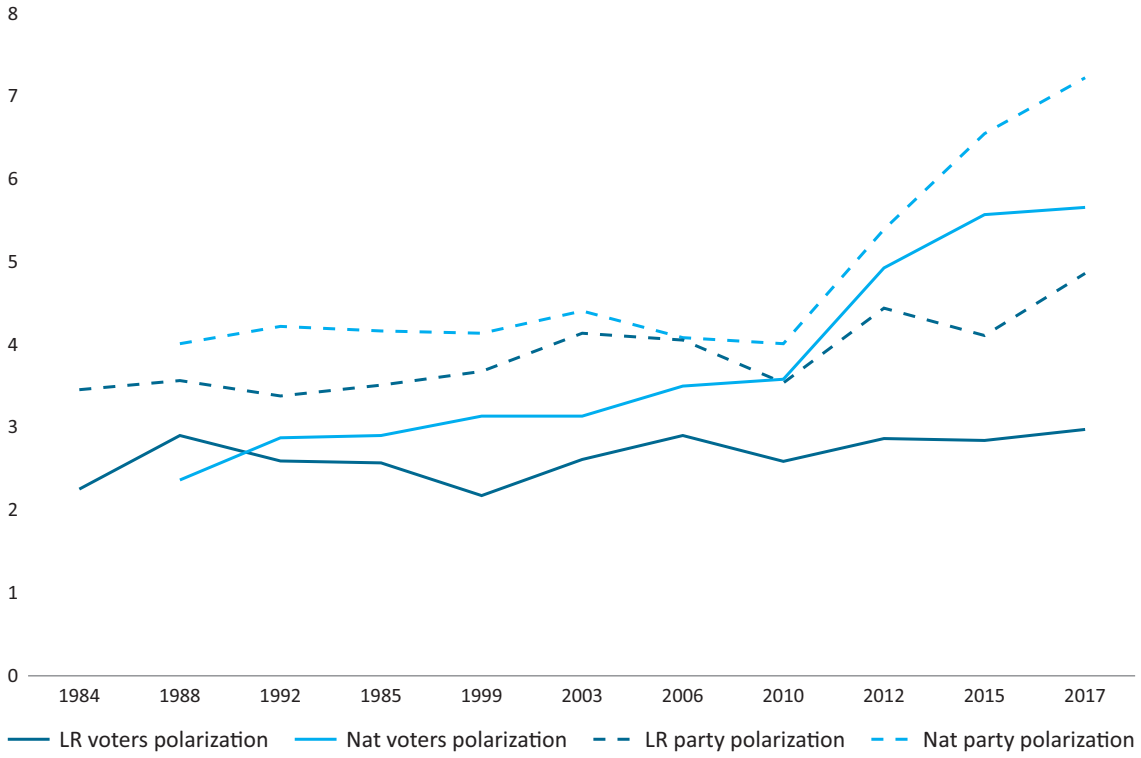

Figure 2. Party system polarization in the left–right dimension and the national dimension. Source: Authors' elaboration using CIS's post-electoral surveys based on Dalton's Polarization Index (see the Appendix).

of the party system (measured using Dalton's polarization index; see the Supplementary File). As seen in Figure 2, perceived polarization in the centre-periphery cleavage increased smoothly throughout the decade at both the elite and the mass level and measured in terms of both the left–right dimension and the national dimension. National polarization has usually been slightly higher than the left–right dimension. At the party level, the difference between left–right and national polarization increased particularly significantly after 2006. While the left–right-weighted distances among parties and voters remained unchanged overall, the rise in national polarization was related to the centrifugal dynamics perceived by individuals, especially regarding the emerging party in those years, Ciudadanos (Citizens)—a party that represented tough opposition to Catalan nationalism—and CiU, along with its party successors. These two forces exemplify the divergent paths followed by Catalan parties in the national dimension as perceived by the electorate (Figure 3). This evolution suggests that the pattern of party radicalization between 2006 and 2012 was part of a general trend that brought all political parties further from the centre at the zenith of the secession crisis in 2017.

As a consequence, individual perceptions of polarization increased over the course of the decade. Interestingly, this evolution was not necessarily consistent across the electorate. As seen in Figure 4, the trend was clearer in the vertical dimension than in the horizontal dimension as well as among voters from non-regionalist parties. Hence, regionalist voters tended to exhibit higher rates of horizontal polarization, i.e., they saw larger differences between parties compared to non-regionalists' perceptions. As for the vertical dimension, some parties developed stronger perceptions of the ideological distances between themselves and the parties of the system. Indeed, PP's, Ciudadanos', ERC's, and CiU's voters all showed higher rates of vertical ideological distances, which steadily increased from 2003. By contrast, those who voted for more moderate parties—like Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC, Catalan Socialist Party) and Iniciativa Catalunya Verds (ICV, Initiative for Catalonia Greens)—manifested lower perceptions of polarization.

However, by 2012 all party electorates achieved the highest levels of vertical and horizontal polarization in the series. This was the result of the policy change in the territorial issue adopted by CiU in competition with ERC, as between 2010 and 2012 both parties included explicit demands for a secession referendum within their electoral platforms, framing these demands in terms of democracy, justice, and necessity (to solve the economic crisis). Interestingly, this evolution was not replicated to the same extent by the non-regionalist parties—even though parties like PSC, PP, and particularly Ciudadanos each had a clear position against secession—as they usually downplayed or did not give credibility to such demands, often describing the secessionists' momentum as a "soufflé" (Paz, 2012). Some parties (PSC, ICV) even accepted the possibility of holding a sort of referendum on devolution. Hence, in those years, centrifugal competition came mostly from Catalan regionalist forces, while non-regionalists instead tended to emphasize the

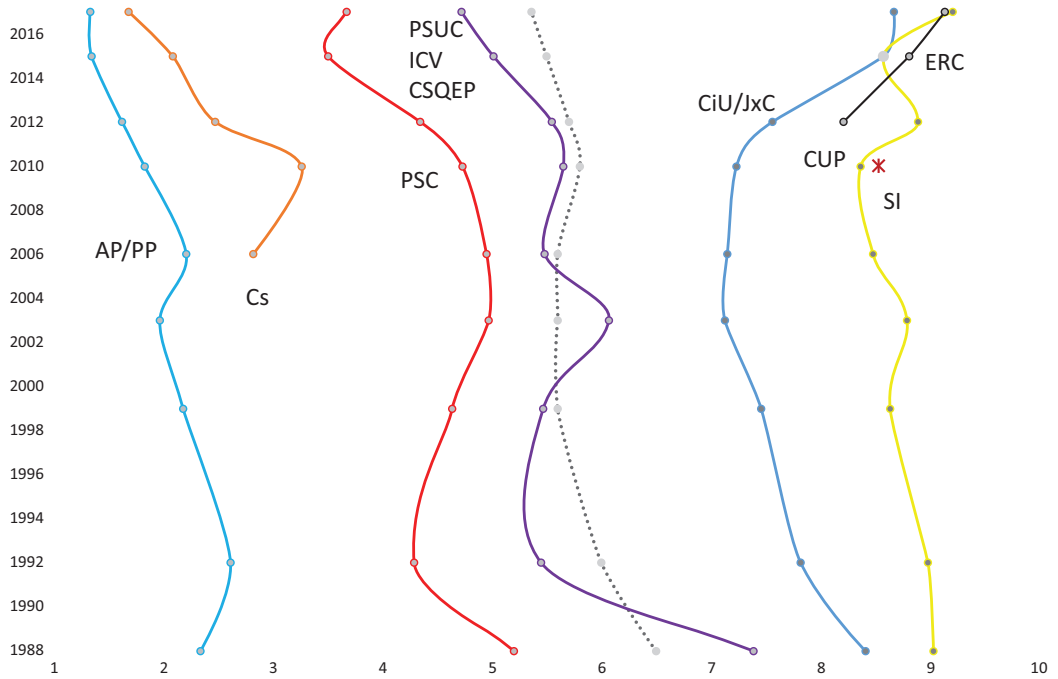

Figure 3. Party position in the national dimension—according to voters—in Catalonia. Notes: Parties are located according to voters' view in an axis where 10 is the highest level of Catalan nationalism and 0 the lowest; the dotted line shows voters' own position. Source: Authors' elaboration using CIS's post-electoral surveys.

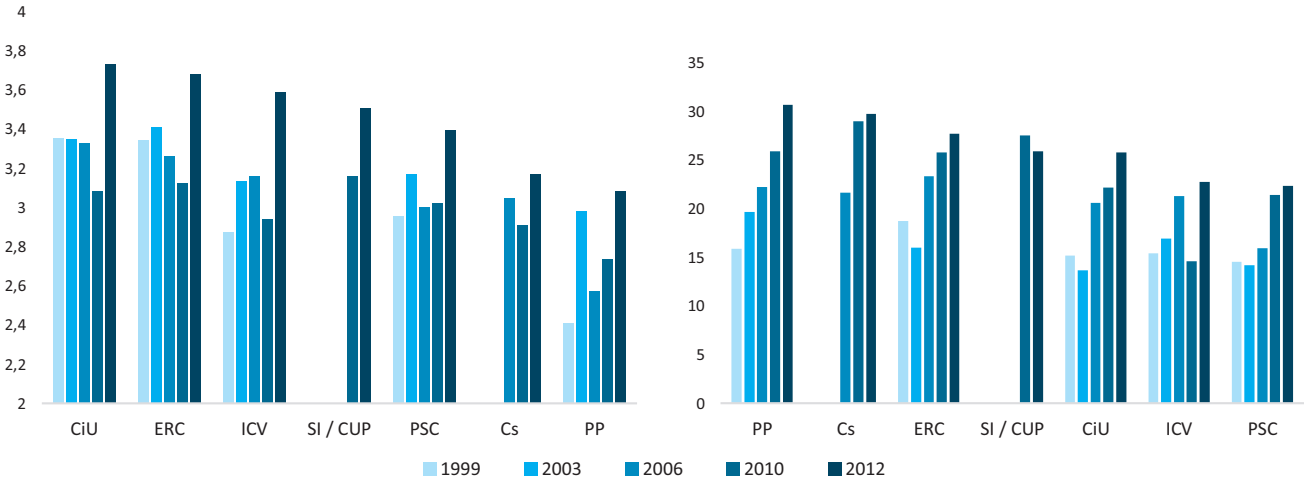

Figure 4. Evolution of horizontal (right) and vertical (left) polarization by parties. Source: Authors' elaboration using CIS's post-electoral surveys based on polarization indexes (see Section 4).

economy and the need to overcome the Great Recession. The mottos selected for the 2012 election reflected these different approaches. Indeed, whereas ERC explicitly mentioned secession ("vote for independence") and CiU defended "the will of the people," PSC presented itself as "the reasonable alternative" and both PP and Ciudadanos stated the idea of "better together" (Barrio et al., 2018).

Overall, this political context was defined by centrifugal dynamics of party competition fed by regionalist forces as well as a pattern of increasing perceived distances between parties and between parties and voters. In the next section, we will attempt to connect this pattern with changes in individuals' preferences regarding the national issue.

4. Hypotheses, Data, and Methods

This study employs the concept of polarization to capture how individuals perceived changes in party positions in the national cleavage as a consequence of the centrifugal party competition held in the previous decade, as introduced in Section 3. The effect of these perceptions of party positions can be better understood under the light provided by party cues. Such cues may operate as heuristics for voters, reducing the costs of expressing opinions with regard to controversial issues (Lupia, 1994). Parties may also influence opinions through partisan-motivated reasoning, as mentioned in Section 2.2, when voters adopt parties' positions because they identify with them and want to continue supporting them (Bolsen et al., 2014). In this vein, several analysts have suggested that the progressive adoption by CiU of the demand for a secession referendum (and its support for secession as well) made it easier for many of this party's voters to move towards the same position (Martí, 2013; Rico & Liñeira, 2014), even where they already had a "crystallized" position (Guntermann, 2017). Hence, after years of criticism raised by regionalist parties against the constitutional Spanish framework, sending cues about their evolution towards more radical positions and adopting frame strategies to legitimate the new demands for a vote on secession, these parties were able to persuade most of their voters that they were truly committed to their new claims for independence. On the other side of the party system, non-regionalist parties were less convinced of this policy turn and initially decided to simply wait for the secessionist momentum to vanish (which did not happen).

Therefore, according to the political portrait presented in the previous section, our general expectation is that (perceived) polarization impelled many voters towards clearer positions regarding the national issue. However, this effect might have differed depending on voters' orientations, particularly with regard to their preferred party. While polarization might have initially been a source of support for independence among regionalist voters (H_1), it is less likely that it played the same strong role to foster hard opposition against secession among those non-regionalist parties' voters (H_2). Hence, the party cues provided by regionalist parties regarding the issue should have made it easier for regionalist voters to perceive greater distances among parties in the centre-periphery cleavage. As a consequence, regionalist voters with higher perceptions of horizontal polarization should have been more likely to support secession (H_{1a}). An alternative way of observing the effect of polarization is by considering the importance of the party cues provided by one's own party in reinforcing one's perceptions of its distances from other parties that do not share the same approach. Accordingly, support for secession should have increased as regionalist voters perceived that their positions regarding the national issue had moved further away from most of the parties: vertical polarization (H_{1b}). Both hypotheses assume that polarization initially affected potential supporters of secession more than those who remained sceptical or opposed. Alternatively, if polarized perceptions spread

equally among all subsets of regionalist voters from the beginning, we should expect a non-significant effect of polarization (null hypothesis).

Given that the non-regionalist parties had more reactive positions regarding the territorial issue than their regionalist counterparts, as most of them did not exclusively focus on this issue, and given that some of them (e.g., PSC) entered the debate with moderate positions (for instance, not completely rejecting the idea of a referendum), we can expect that polarization produced a less sharp effect regarding support for secession among non-regionalist voters. Hence, given that these voters perceived smaller differences among parties and the different subsets of non-regionalist voters' perceptions regarding vertical polarization were more heterogeneous, we should expect a weaker or irrelevant (negative) impact of both horizontal (H_{2a}) and vertical (H_{2b}) polarization on their territorial preferences. Alternatively, the null hypothesis for this second expectation is that polarization produced the same equivalent (but opposite) effect in both electorates. This null hypothesis would mean that non-regionalist voters would also adopt polarized positions and would indeed oppose secession in the same extent than regionalist voters expressed support for it.

As several scholars have shown, identity is a fundamental driver of secession. Therefore, we should expect identity not only to have a positive effect, but also to act as a multiplier of the polarization effect among regionalist voters, as radicalization among regionalist parties should be particularly persuading to those with a strong Catalan national identity (H_3). Hence, to observe this additional effect we will introduce an interaction between these two variables in our general model.

To estimate the impact of polarization at the individual level, we employ two different indicators. *Horizontal polarization* (the perceived distance between parties) is operationalized with Lupu's (2015) index of perceived party polarization, as the sum of the weighted average distances between each pair of parties:

$$\text{Horizontal Polarization} = \sum_{k=1}^{m-1} \sum_{j=1}^{m} \frac{w_j + w_k}{m - 1} \left| p_j - p_k \right|$$

where j and k are different parties, p_j and p_k are the ideological positions the respondent assigned parties j and k in the left–right axis, w_j and w_k are their vote shares, and m is the number of parties the respondent placed.

In addition, *vertical polarization* measures the aggregated distances between each individual and each party, as perceived by the former. We measure it using our own estimation of the average of the sum of the distances between the voter and each party:

$$\text{Vertical Polarization} = \frac{\sum_{j=1} \left(v - p_j \right)}{m}$$

where v is the voter's self-placement and p_j is the ideological position of each political party (as perceived by the same voter) in the left–right axis, while m is the number of parties the respondent placed.

The research uses survey data from CIS' post-electoral studies concerning the Catalan elections in 2012. We also use CIS' post-electoral studies of previous regional elections in Catalonia since 1999 to estimate the polarization indices. They include questions to elicit respondents' opinions of the centre-periphery cleavage (the dependent variable) and the extent of Catalan nationalism (the main independent variable), measured using an index from 1 to 10 (where 10 is the maximum level of Catalan nationalism); individuals give their own position as well as those of the main parties. We utilize this index to compute the variables with respect to polarization and run logistic regression models to estimate the effects on the three dependent variables.

Our dependent variable is support for secession. We build a dummy variable from an original categorical variable asking which kind of territorial arrangement is preferable for Spain, among five options: no decentralization at all, less decentralization, status quo, more decentralization, or the possibility of self-determination for regions aiming to become an independent state. The last option is usually taken as support for independence (or at least the chance to decide via referendum).

The research hypotheses assume different effects of polarization on the dependent variable depending on voters' choice of political party. Hence, our models will be run on two different sets of voters: regionalist parties and non-regionalist parties. The first group comprises those who in 2012 voted for either CiU, ERC, or Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP, Candidacy of Popular Union), a radical left-wing party supporting independence. These parties were more clearly aligned in favour of an independence referendum in the 2012 electoral campaign. The second group comprises PSC, PP, and Ciudadanos. These parties have traditionally been opposed to independence and defend Catalonia's union with Spain. We do not include within these groups those who voted for ICV, a regionalist party with links to the Spanish radical left that is not formally in favour of secession but is amenable to discussing terms for a referendum. Alternatively, to check the robustness of our results we will observe the differences depending on the vote held in 2010 (reported by individuals in 2012). In the same vein, we will employ data from CIS' 2010 post-electoral study E2857 and include the indicators used in the 2012 survey.

Our models include several control items, like gender, age, profession, education, and town size. More importantly, the models also control for the main explanations provided by previous studies: birthplace (in Catalonia or elsewhere), main language employed (Catalan, Spanish, both, or other), criticism of the economic situation, and, above all, national identity (measured using the Moreno-Linz question, which distinguishes individuals feeling only Spaniard or only Catalan, more Spaniard than Catalan and vice versa, or as Catalan as Spaniard).

5. Empirical Findings

If regionalist parties—and particularly CiU—were embroiled in centrifugal competition, thereby polarizing the electorate's political attitudes, did this polarization play a role in fostering support for secession? To test our hypotheses, we regress support for secession by different types of polarization and other control variables with opinion data from 2012. Figure 5 plots the average marginal effects of each dimension of polarization according to each group of voters (the results for the full models are reported in Tables A2 and A3 in the Supplementary File).

Indeed, the results show that both horizontal and vertical national polarization had a significant effect on support for secession. Hence, all things being equal, an increase of one unit in perceived distance between parties on the nationalism scale would increase by 50% the chances of an individual supporting secession relative to other territorial preferences (H_{1a}). Similarly, a one-point increase in perceived distance between each voter and all the political parties would raise their probability of supporting secession by 136% (H_{1b}). This significant positive effect is generally constant across different types of models' specifications and different operationalizations of the dependent variable. The positive effect remains constant in spite of the influence of other common explanations (like economic criticism and being a Catalan speaker).

We should report an unexpected change of direction in the horizontal polarization effect (Model 3 in Table A2 in the Supplementary File) when both dimensions (horizontal and vertical) are included in the model simultaneously. None of the other specifications of the model produce this change. There are no signs of collinearity in this model and the correlation between the two dimensions is moderate (0.4). Given that both factors are based on the same original index, it seems that the vertical indicator is better at capturing the influence on support for secession.

However, this unexpected negative drift of the horizontal indicator disappears when we test the interaction effect between polarization and identity (Model 4 in the Supplementary File). The significant positive effects of both indicators of polarization are constant across different specifications of the interaction model and give empirical support to H_3. Moreover, the measures of fit suggest that this interaction model fits better than the models without interaction. Hence, as we expected, identity multiplies polarization's effect on support for secession. In Figure 6, we can observe this effect through the predictive values of the dependent variables estimated for the interaction in Model 4. It is interesting to note that the interaction between horizontal polarization and identity shows that having only or predominantly a Catalan identity made regionalist voters more receptive of regionalist parties, while among those regionalist voters who claimed to feel as Spanish as Catalan (or more Spanish), the horizontal polarization effect progressively reduced their support.

Regarding non-regionalist voters, the effect of both horizontal (H_{2a}) and vertical (H_{2a}) polarization indicators is negative, but as we expected the coefficients are statistically non-significant and, in the case of the horizontal dimension, almost zero. This result is robust to different specifications, including the simple version (with each polarization index as the only dependent variable) and the introduction of the interaction with identity.

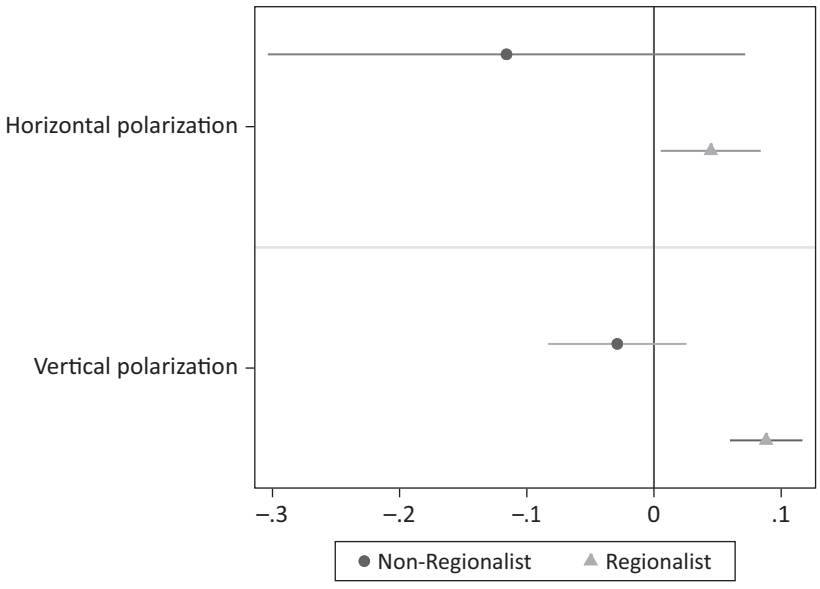

Figure 5. Average marginal effects of horizontal and vertical polarization on support for independence in 2012 by types of parties. Notes: The complete results of the models can be found in Tables A2 and A3 in the Appendix (Models 1, 2, 5 and 6).

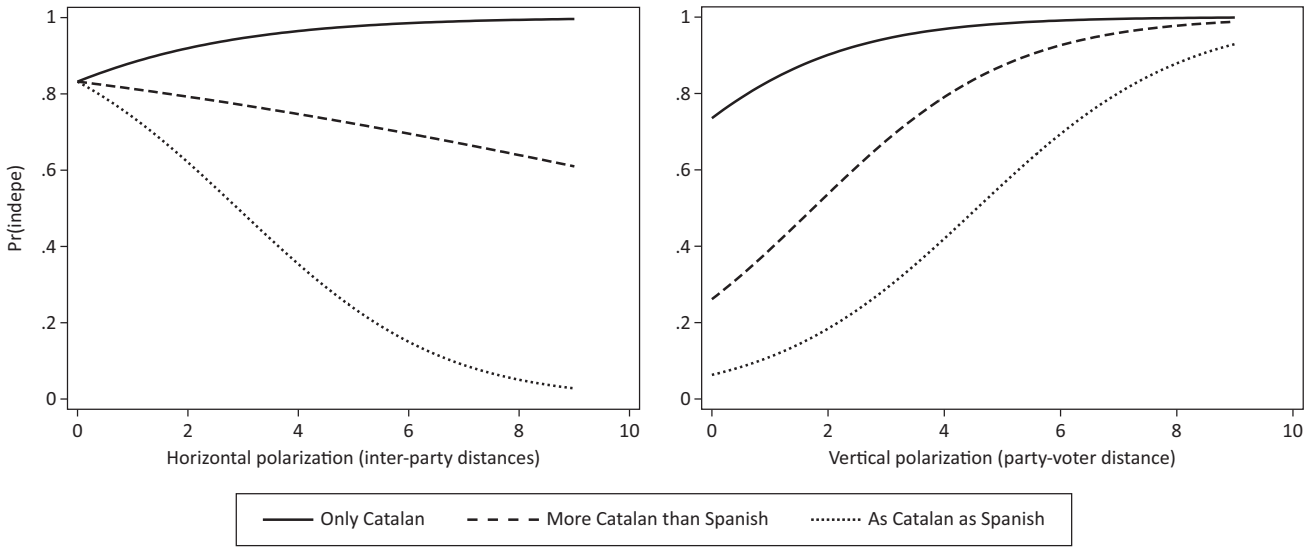

Figure 6. Predicted probabilities of support for independence among voters from regionalist parties given different levels of polarization by national identity. Notes: Predicted probabilities are based on Model 4; see Table A2 in the Appendix for the complete results.

This result suggests that polarization produced a different outcome among non-regionalist voters: Although some of the more polarized were apparently among those against secession, many non-polarized voters also opposed it (a dynamic that was less frequent in the case of regionalist voters).

Given that the 2012 election experienced a significant degree of volatility among the parties (17.2 points, the highest since 1988), polarization might have stimulated party switching. Hence, a significant proportion of non-regionalist voters who voted for PSC in 2010 switched to ERC two years later (Rico & Liñeira, 2014). In this case, we may be facing a problem of self-selection bias, because polarization is hiding the effect of vote switching, focusing only on voters who had already switched to a different party because of their territorial preferences. In response to this potential problem, we have checked the effect of the models over different sets of the electorate, distinguishing them according to whom they reported voting for in 2010 (the coefficients are not presented here). Significantly, the main results of our variables regarding polarization remain constant. Even the change of direction experienced by horizontal polarization among regionalist voters in Model 3 disappears, as it maintains the same significant positive direction. Thus, the results of our expectation are robust to the definition of the subset of voters (2012 vote or 2010 vote).

Alternatively, our findings may simply indicate that polarization is necessarily connected to greater support for secessionist positions among regionalist voters. To consider this potential counterargument, we run the same models with a post-electoral survey conducted after the 2010 election (the coefficients are not presented here). The results show a weaker role of polarization in explaining support for independence among regionalist voters. Although vertical polarization still yields significant results, the coefficient is much lower than in 2012, in some cases approaching zero, particularly when identity is introduced as a factor. In addition, horizontal polarization is constantly non-significant and close to zero. We find the same outcome for non-regionalist voters, whose coefficients are almost zero and non-significant. Overall, these results indicate that polarization was irrelevant in explaining individuals' attitudes towards independence in 2010. The results are consistent with what we expected from the party strategies implemented to date. Although by 2010 CiU had evolved a more critical position regarding the issue, its strategy was still far from being a pro-secession position, while ERC continued to emphasize social issues (the party had been in the government since 2003). Only the new pro-secession electoral coalition Solidaritat Catalana per la Independència (SI, Catalan Solidarity for Independence) was explicitly supporting independence as a central issue, but the sample of its voters in the survey was too small to check the hypothesis.

6. Conclusion

The literature analysing support for secession has usually relied on structural factors to explain the prevalence of claims for independence over time. However, Catalonia offers a challenging case of a sudden, rapid rise in such claims in a narrow span of time, for which agency factors—particularly the role of parties and leaders—could provide more useful explanations. We have suggested a two-step process. First, given that Catalan regionalist parties had progressively adopted more radical positions regarding the centre-periphery cleavage over the course of the decade (as has been stated by previous works), these centrifugal strategies were

perceived by the electorate as drivers of growing polarization. Indeed, we have provided empirical evidence of a smooth increase in polarization among the electorate, particularly between 2006 and 2012. Second, when the parties strengthened their outbidding competition around 2012, transforming their platforms and their messages to explicitly pledge their support for secession, many of their voters were more likely to follow the cue and give their support to independence as well. After measuring perceived polarization at the horizontal level (between parties) and the vertical level (between parties and voters) in the national cleavage, this article has shown that both dimensions of polarization were significantly related to an increase in support for secession and voting for the applicable parties among regionalist voters, but not necessarily among non-regionalist ones.

This article is a first step to observe the political consequences of centrifugal strategies and polarization in the nationalist dimension for the territorial preferences of the electorate in a context of great significance in the centre-periphery cleavage. Furthermore, Guntermann and Blais (2020) are among those to have suggested that moderate voters may finally be persuaded to take sides in a context of high elite polarization, based on analysing data from 2017, by which time polarization had spread throughout the electorate. Our study suggests that, at the beginning of this political process, such alignment only occurred among the most polarized voters and not necessarily in the two-party blocks. Future studies should observe what happened in the interim and how the polarization of both elites and voters evolved in parallel, along with the consequences. Accordingly, more attention should be given to those parties that adopted more centrifugal strategies, like Ciudadanos, in order to ascertain how they could benefit from this polarization.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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

Juan Rodríguez-Teruel is an associated professor at the University of Valencia. He has also been lecturer at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and visiting fellow at the London School of Economics, Edinburgh, Leiden, Nottingham, and Université Libre de Bruxelles. His main areas of research are political elites, party politics, and executive politics. He is author of *Ministers in Democratic Spain* (Linz Award 2007, in Spanish). His work has been published in *South European Politics and Society, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Comparative European Politics, Acta Politica* and *Contemporary Sociology*. He is founding editor of the political website Agenda Pública.

Astrid Barrio is an associated professor at University of Valencia. She has also been lecturer at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Her main fields of research are political parties, populism, Spanish politics, and Catalan nationalism. Her work has been published in *South European Politics and Society, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Comparative European Politics*, and *Mediterranean Politics*.

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Article

The Relevance of Language as a Predictor of the Will for Independence in Catalonia in 1996 and 2020

Jordi Argelaguet

Department of Political Science and Public Law, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain;
E-Mail: jordi.argelaguet@uab.cat

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Abstract
The Catalan secessionist parties, if added together, have won all the elections to the Parliament of Catalonia from 2010 to 2021. Their voters have been increasingly mobilized since the start of the controversial reform process of the Statute of Autonomy (2004–2010). The aim of this article is twofold. First, it intends to test whether language is the strongest predictor in preferring independence in two separate and distinct moments, 1996 and 2020. And second, to assess whether its strength has changed—and how—between both years. Only the most exogenous variables to the dependent variable are used in each of two logistic regressions to avoid problems of endogeneity: sex, age, size of town of residence, place of birth of the individual and of their parents, first language (L1), and educational level. Among them, L1 was—and still is—the most powerful predictor, although it is not entirely determinative. The secessionist movement not only gathers a plurality of Catalan native speakers, but it receives a not insignificant level of support among those who have Spanish as their L1. Conversely, the unionist group, despite being composed primarily by people who have Spanish as their L1 and have their family origins outside Catalonia, has a native Catalan-speaking minority inside. This imperfect division, which is based on ethnolinguistic alignments—and whose relevance cannot be neglected—alleviates the likelihood of an ethnic-based conflict.

Keywords
Catalonia; effective number of language groups; independence; language; logistic regression; secessionism; subjective national identity

Issue
This article is part of the issue “Secessionism in Liberal Democracies: What Do We Really Know About the Explanations of Secessionism?” edited by Ferran Requejo (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain) and Marc Sanjaume-Calvet (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain / Open University of Catalonia, Spain).

1. Introduction

Secessionism, since the first successful declaration of independence was signed in 1776, is present in the political reality worldwide. Indeed, between 1945 and 2011, an average of 52 active secessionist movements per year has been identified (Griffiths, 2015). In parallel, there are two major approaches to analyse them: comparative studies and case studies. The latter is the option taken here, with the intention of bringing some clues to understand the growth of secessionism in Catalonia in recent years.

The Catalan case has received some attention because it is a secessionist process within a consolidated democracy, and within a relatively heterogeneous society, in linguistic and cultural terms. This heterogeneity is the result of several waves of immigration over the last decades. As a result, 36.4% of the population living in Catalonia were born outside of Catalonia (Institut d’Estadística de Catalunya, 2020). In this context, the Catalan language, a traditional marker of “Catalanness,” went from being the first language (L1) of the vast majority of the Catalan population in 1900 (de Rosselló Peralta et al., 2020), to becoming L1 of only 31.5% of the population. Nonetheless, it is the reported language of identification of 43.2% of the population, while 94.4% say they understand Catalan and 81.2% can speak it (Institut d’Estadística de Catalunya, 2018).

At the beginning of the democratic period in Spain, the percentage of secessionists was relatively low (in 1979 it was 8.6%, according to Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas [CIS], 1979). Between 1990 and 2010, it fluctuated around one-third of the population (see CIS, 1996, 2001; Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials [ICPS], 2020). From 2011 to the present, the percentage has been around 44% (see Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió [CEO], 2021a, 2021b; ICPS, 2020). Therefore, in a few years, the growth of independence has been quite important, and it must be explained in the context of the political events that have taken place in Catalonia (Argelaguet, 2014; Casas et al., 2019; Colomines i Companys, 2020; Orriols & Rodon, 2016; Rico & Liñeira, 2014).

In this sense, the fact that the percentage of secessionists in Catalonia, either in the polls (about 44%) or in the electoral results (in the 2021 elections, the combined pro-independence parties obtained 51% of the votes), is striking because it is higher than the percentage of people who have Catalan as their L1 (about 32%) or even the percentage of those with Catalan as "language of identification" (43%). This difference could be considered an outcome of the decision made by the main Catalan nationalist parties to promote a political discourse whose aim is to go beyond the perimeter of its core ethnic group, Catalan native speakers. The main leaders of the Catalan secessionist movement—Artur Mas, president of the Catalan government and Oriol Junqueras, president of the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC; Argelaguet, 2011)—have underlined, for instance, that in an eventual independent Catalonia, the Catalan and the Spanish languages will be official languages (Barbeta, 2012; Junqueras, 2012). This compromise, however, generated a great debate within the ranks of the secessionist movement with hard-fought positions (Sendra, 2016), and links with the more academic debate on the scope of the civic component that has been historically detected in Catalan nationalism (Conversi, 1997; Keating, 1996; McRoberts, 2001). However, other authors have provided data that would seriously question this thesis (Álvarez-Gálvez et al., 2018; Miley, 2007).

The aim of this article is to check whether there has been a change over time in the role of the language in explaining the secessionist preferences that exist in Catalonia. The methodological option followed is to make a comparison of the data of two surveys conducted at two very different moments in time and in very different political contexts: 1996 and 2020. 1996 was the highest point of collaboration in the governance of Spain by the moderate Catalan nationalist force Convergència i Unió (CiU; Barrio & Barberà, 2011). On the other hand, in 2020, secessionism had most seats in the Parliament of Catalonia.

For each year, I have used strictly the same model of a logistic regression, with the same variables, to see the elements of change and continuity, and whether the exacerbation of the conflict has produced changes in the internal composition based on linguistic groups of the two opposing poles: the secessionist and the non-secessionist. The variables used are the maximum possible exogenous to the dependent variable (the percentage of supporters of independence) to avoid problems of endogeneity or inverted causality: sex, age, size of town of residence, place of birth of the individual and of their parents, L1, and educational level.

Therefore, the proposed analysis allows increasing knowledge about a specific case that has aroused some interest in recent years, while providing data that will contrast the Catalan case with other cases and, perhaps, improve the knowledge that has been generated with their comparative analysis. The article will proceed as follows: In the next sections, I will present some theoretical considerations about the study of nationalism and secessionism. Then, I will present the data and methodology, show the results and address their discussion. I conclude by pointing out some clues to understand the framework through which the political debate in Catalonia can take place in the coming years.

2. Theoretical Background

The study of secessionism is linked to the study of nationalism. Inside the latter, there is a very relevant debate, propelled from the seminal work of Hans Kohn, about the existence of two types of nationalism, civic and ethnic (Kohn, 1944). The first one is based on the idea of inclusiveness, so that an individual's belonging to the nation is linked to voluntary elements, including adherence to legal norms. In contrast, the latter assumes that being a member of a nation is due to ascriptive elements, including ancestry, blood inheritance, or customs. This dichotomy, despite having been widely used, is criticized for being more normative than descriptive (Tamir, 2019) because its two components—"civic nationalism" and "ethnic nationalism"—are loaded terms and, moreover, "ethnic nationalism" is used pejoratively (Yacobson, 2013); others consider that is perhaps not a dichotomy but a continuum (Smith, 1991) because these are concepts with blurred borders that, in addition, are overburdened by usage, by the actors in the political conflict (Brubaker, 2004); in this case, this distinction—described as "Manichean" because one is good and the other bad—is "both normatively and analytically problematic" (Brubaker, 1998, p. 274).

Despite all this debate, this typology remains widely used in quantitative analysis, as is the case of the studies based on questions on national identity that have been included in the International Social Survey Program over several years. Using factor analysis, two dimensions have been identified from the answers given to the question of how important some elements are to define one's own national identity. The question is posed as follows in the questionnaire: "Some people say that the following things are important for being truly [nationality]. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is?", and the respondent was then

asked about the importance of: (a) having been born in country X; (b) having country X's citizenship; (c) having lived in country X for most of one's life; (d) being able to speak country X's language; (e) being of a certain dominant religion; (f) respecting country X's nationality, political institutions, and laws; and (g) feeling a certain nationality (International Social Survey Program, 2015).

This empirical approach raises some problematic issues: There is a great diversity of interpretations of data (Jayet, 2012); there are discrepancies about how to label the dimensions that were found; and there is no same constant classification for all countries of the seven items in their respective dimensions. Moreover, there is a quite important level of association among all the items that can blur the dimensions. Nonetheless, items that include "to be born," "to have country's citizenship," "to have lived," and "religion" are usually linked to an ethnic dimension; and items "language," "to respect political institutions," and "to feel" link back to a civic dimension (Larsen, 2017). In addition, however, some items are not easily attributable to the "civic" or "ethnic" dimension, as is the case of "language," "an element of ethnic nationalism (a heritage of a culture) and, at the same time, it belongs to civic nationalism as an instrument of communication and of the participation in political institutions" (Jayet, 2012, p. 72). This debate is also present in the Catalan case (Álvarez-Gálvez et al., 2018). On the one hand, the Catalan language is the most obvious ethnic cultural marker of Catalan identity but, on the other hand, the language can be learned and become a source of social integration so that language barriers become permeable, which means that the language can be clearly distinguished from other ascriptive attributes, such as familial descent (Miley, 2007).

When the object of study becomes more focused on the analysis of secessionism, the initial point of reference is the seminal contribution of Donald L. Horowitz, who argues that the secessionism is explained in the framework of the intersection of ethnic identity and the socio-economic development of the groups involved. In poorer regions, through elites who exploit the resentment of the masses, secessionist ideologies are more likely to develop (Horowitz, 1985). At the same time, he shows that the relationship between ethnic diversity and severe ethnic conflict is nonmonotonic, with less violence for highly homogeneous and highly heterogeneous countries.

From here, the analysis of secessionism is devoted to answering several questions: Which are the factors that activate secessionism—once it is assessed that the cultural identity is very important but it is not determinant (Sorens, 2005)—given that there is a widespread range of competing hypotheses revolving around economic, cultural, and political factors? Does decentralization—and if so, under what circumstances—calm or ignite secessionism (Brancati, 2006)? Is secessionism (or, more broadly, ethnolinguistic mobilization) associated with violence (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998)? Is language conflict a prescription for violence, or rather can language conflict, "under certain potentially incendiary conditions…help to contain violence" (Laitin, 2000, p. 98)? Finally, does the probability of conflict depend on ethnic diversity, as measured by the index of ethnic fractionalization (ELF). Despite it being widely used, the ELF receives some criticism: It is difficult to count all the groups, and it does not take into account the cultural distance among groups (Fearon, 2003), its historical evolution (Drazanova, 2020), or the polarization between them (Esteban et al., 2012).

However, with the intention of overcoming the shortcomings of the analyses compared to a very large N, it may be convenient to resort to case studies to test general propositions in more detailed contexts and explore what are the elements that explain the growth of secessionism as, for instance, the present case of Catalonia.

In the Catalan case, like in other cases, secessionism can be analysed with electoral and other sociodemographic aggregated data or using opinion polls. With survey data, one can identify the strong predictors for independence, among them there is the national identification of the individual, also commonly referred to as subjective national identity (SNI). Because this variable is widely present in most of the analysis, it is helpful to clarify the problems associated with its use.

The SNI is operationalized through the so-called "Linz-Moreno question" (Moreno, 2006), which, despite its great academic use, has some problems: It does not adequately capture the identity intensity or linearity with national feelings and collects the existence of a large, too heterogeneous intermediate group (Guinjoan & Rodon, 2016). In addition, the Catalan case has the problem of multiple meanings of the terms "Spanish" and "Catalan" (both can have a national or administrative meaning); and that of not being formulated in an excluding way (Cussó et al., 2018). However, the use of this scale is very common and has generated a large amount of data that allows comparative analysis in space and time.

The SNI in Catalonia has changed over the years. These changes have been more important between 1991 and 2006 than between 2010 and 2020, the years of the acceleration of the bid for independence (Table 1).

To explain the SNI, several aspects of the socialization process have to be considered: family (Rico & Jennings, 2012), school (Clots-Figueras & Masella, 2013), media (Hierro, 2010; Oller et al., 2019), government action (Martínez-Herrera, 2002). However, their impacts depend on the socio-demographic environment of each person (Barceló, 2014; Rodon & Guinjoan, 2018).

Moreover, Serrano (2013) has proposed going beyond the sociodemographic factors that are given by birth, emphasizing the intervention of other relevant variables linked to nation-building policies, associated with changes in the institutional context that resulted from devolution arrangements, as the independent effect of media consumption in Catalan or, even, the support for fiscal autonomy. Despite all these elements, L1 is the key predictor for explaining SNI and, by

Table 1. Evolution of the subjective national identity in Catalonia (1991–2020).

	1991	1996	2006	2010	2011	2020
Only Spanish + More Spanish than Catalan	17.4	24.4	10.8	9.4	9.0	10.1
Equally Spanish as Catalan	46.7	36.5	44.3	42.5	42.8	39.2
Only Catalan + More Catalan than Spanish	35.3	36.7	41.7	45.8	46.4	44.7
DK/DA	0.6	2.4	3.2	2.3	1.8	6.0
N	1.972	797	2.000	2.000	2.500	6.000
	ICPS	CIS 2228	CEO 367	CEO 612	CEO 652	CEO 2020[1]

Notes: The usual five categories have been collapsed into three; [1] In 2020, it is the merger of the CEO's three surveys: No. 962, no. 974, and no. 985. Sources: CEO (2006, 2010, 2011, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c), CIS (1996), ICPS (1991).

extension, the preference for independence (Chernyha & Burg, 2012).

Therefore, even though it is a verified fact that the older generations have been replaced by more pro-independence generations (Bartomeus, 2018), the significant increase in secessionism from 2010 onward would not be explained by the small changes in the SNI. For this reason, other complementary hypotheses have been raised, such as risk aversion by gender (Verge et al., 2015), or, above all, that the growth of secessionism would have been driven by political elites in an outbidding process (Barrio & Rodríguez-Teruel, 2017). As an alternative to this top-down hypothesis, others raise the bottom-up one, that is, there would have been a very intense pro-secession popular mobilization that, through large demonstrations or holding popular consultations (Muñoz & Guinjoan, 2013), would have pushed the parties, from 2008, to act in favour of independence (Dowling, 2014).

Without being able to ignore the weight of the SNI, other analyses have focused on fiscal policy preferences (Boylan, 2015), on individual exposure to the effects of the global economy (Hierro & Queralt, 2020), and on the concurrence of instrumental and welfare maximizing reasons (Muñoz & Tormos, 2015). However, with aggregate or individual level data, others state that there would be no relationship between crisis and the rise of secessionism (Bel et al., 2019; Cuadras-Morató & Rodon, 2019), or find that the pro-independence vote in 2017 is more tied to individuals' place of birth and that, in contrast, typically economic predictors (GDP per capita, poverty level, or unemployment level) are not relevant (Maza et al., 2019).

In conclusion, to explain secessionism in Catalonia, instead of re-including the SNI due to measurement and endogeneity problems with the dependent variable (Tormos et al., 2015), I will use the variables that are as exogenous as possible to it: L1, individual's place of birth and their parents' place of birth, gender, age, size of town of residence, and level of education. It has been ruled out to include the ideological variable, measured through self-location on the left–right axis, because in Catalonia it carries an endogenous component linked to the national question (Dinas, 2012).

In consequence of the previous exposition, the hypotheses that are going to be tested are the following ones:

H1: Language is one of the basic features defining an ethnic group (Fishman, 1999, p. 4); it is able to generate a nationalist movement and even propose a secessionist project; is the most relevant predictor of the socio-demographic variables considered. So, in the case of Catalonia, and in both years under analysis, those citizens with Catalan as their L1 will have more probabilities of being in favour of independence than those citizens whose L1 is Spanish.

H2: Given that it is well established that the escalation of a national conflict—like one related to independence—may lead to a growing social divide alongside language groups, it is expected that the weight of language as a predictor of secessionism in any person will increase its importance if the context becomes politically agitated. So, in the case of Catalonia, between 1996 and 2020, the likelihood of wanting independence if the L1 of this person is Catalan (in contrast to if their L1 is Spanish) will increase. Specifically, it should be noted that the growth of secessionism will be proportionally stronger among Catalans with Catalan as their L1 than among the rest of the people. If this happens, it will be evidence that the independence process would have reinforced the social division based on the linguistic alignment of individuals.

H3: The growing warming of the political debate in a context where the language factor is relevant must imply that each language group will be progressively aligned with each option (Catalan native speakers with independence and Spanish native speakers with non-independence). The outcome will be that in both blocs—for and against independence—their language diversity will be reduced, measured by applying the formula for effective number of parties to calculate the effective number of language

groups (ENLG). In this sense, ENLG = $1 / \sum_{i=1}^{n} p_i^2$, within a society or a group of people containing several language groups, where p_i is the language group proportion in the society (or other grouping), according to their L1.

However, because in the case of Catalonia there is enough evidence that the secessionist movement has intended to avoid the risk of social division by underlining that the current linguistic rights of all will not be changed in an eventual Catalan republic (where Catalan and Spanish will be official languages), it will be expected that this homogenization will not only not grow within the secessionist bloc, but, instead, its internal diversity in language groups will increase. This fact could be interpreted as a relatively successful result for the pro-independence movement of having appealed in its political discourse to elements contrary to the division of society by language alignments.

3. Data and Methodology

The data for this analysis comes from two face-to-face surveys. One is the 1996 Study 2228 of the CIS. The second is the merger of the three waves of the 2020 Political Opinion Barometer of the CEO. Despite CIS depending on the Spanish government and CEO on the Catalan one, there is no evidence of substantial bias in their data. They both follow rigorous validation mechanisms of the methodology for obtaining the data, which are widely used by the academic community thanks to their policies of transparency. Moreover, at CEO, the samples are designed considering cross-quotas of gender, age, and place of birth.

The dependent variable is the opinion regarding the independence of Catalonia, and it has been dichotomized (Table 2).

The independent variables included in the logistic regressions are as exogenous as possible to the dependent variable, so that the sense of causality was unidirectional and endogeneity problems were avoided. The variables are sex, age, size of town, individuals' place of birth, parents' place of birth, L1, and level of education. L1 is a trait on which the individual has no capacity for choice, and it is prior to the self-conscious formulation of one's own identity. As for the level of education achieved, despite being the result of a set of diverse factors, I have incorporated it into the analysis because lacking an appropriate measure of social class or socioeconomic status, education could be used as a proxy predictor of social economic status. The frequencies of these variables and their cross tabulation with the dependent variable are shown in Table 1A in the Supplementary File. In this table, two variables have been added, although they are not used in the analysis.

In the next section, I will show the results of the two logistic regressions. The same model has been used to compare the data in 1996 with that of 2020. In the independent variables, the base group is always the first category listed.

4. Results and Discussion

The two regressions return similar results in terms of the direction of the association between the categories of the independent variables and the dependent variable, except for sex and age group. Statistical significance is higher in the 2020 data. Pseudo-R^2 (0.280 in 1996 and 0.321 in 2020) and correctly classified cases (74.8% in 1996 and 73.8% in 2020) are similar (Table 3).

To clearly show the main findings, in Table 3 there are the odds ratios (the Exp(B) of both regressions) and their equivalence in probabilities of wanting independence in relationship to the base group (the first category in each variable).

Gender is associated differently in both years. While in 1996, being male reduces the chances of agreeing with independence, in 2020 it is the other way around and, in addition, it is with minimal statistical significance. It could be explained by the combination of the possible likelihood of the proximity of independence with risk aversion, more present among women.

Table 2. Opinion about the independence of Catalonia (1996 and 2020).

	1996 (CIS 2228, N = 747)	2020 (CEO, N = 6.000)
	Personally, would you be in favour or against that Catalonia was independent?	Do you want Catalonia to become an independent State?
In favour/yes	33.2	43.5
Against/no	52.9	48.9
DK	10.7	5.9
DA	2.1.	1.7
Missing	1.1.	
Total	100	100
Independence?	33.2 (In favour)	43.5 (Yes)
	68.8 (All other answers)	56.5 (All other answers)

Note: In 2020, it is the merger of the CEO's studies no. 962, no. 974, and no. 985. Sources: CIS (1996), CEO (2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

Table 3. Logistic regressions (1996 and 2020).

	1996					2020				
	B	St.Err	sig	Exp(B)	% probability	B	St.Err.	sig	Exp(B)	% probability
Sex										
Female										
Male	−0.046	0.180		0.955	48.85	0.102	0.061	*	1.108	52.56
Age group										
18-24 years										
25–34	−0.086	0.294		0.918	47.86	0.117	0.136		1.124	52.92
35–44	0.064	0.319		1.066	51.60	0.312	0.128	**	1.366	57.73
45–54	0.427	0.356		1.533	60.52	0.578	0.128	***	1.783	64.07
55–64	0.070	0.381		1.072	51.74	0.732	0.133	***	2.078	67.51
65–74	−0.197	0.404		0.821	45.09	0.525	0.137	***	1.691	62.84
>74 years	−0.897	0.521	*	0.408	28.98	0.561	0.158	***	1.752	63.66
Size of town										
Less than 2.001										
2.001–10.000	−0.116	0.383		0.891	47.12	−0.287	0.163	*	0.751	42.89
10.001–50.000	−0.281	0.368		0.755	43.02	−0.422	0.154	***	0.656	39.61
50.001–150.000[1]	−0.025	0.422		0.975	49.37	−0.865	0.160	***	0.421	29.63
150.001–400.000[1]	−0.372	0.385		0.689	40.79	−0.698	0.169	***	0.497	33.20
Barcelona	−0.098	0.358		0.907	47.56	−0.722	0.159	***	0.486	32.71
Birth										
Other answers										
Born in Catalonia	0.679	0.292	**	1.972	66.35	0.570	0.090	***	1.768	63.87
Parents' origins										
Both parents out of Catalonia										
One parent in Cat.	0.465	0.337		1.593	61.43	0.332	0.097	***	1.394	58.23
Both born in Cat.	0.526	0.321		1.691	62.84	0.619	0.105	***	1.857	65.00
L1										
Spanish										
Both Cat. & Spa.	0.859	0.583		2.360	70.24	0.555	0.149	***	1.742	63.53
Catalan	1.206	0.285	***	3.341	76.96	1.360	0.089	***	3.898	79.58
Other answer	0.294	0.609		1.342	57.30	0.569	0.174	***	1.767	63.86
DK/DA	2.389	1.259	*	10.905	91.60	0.710	0.618		2.035	67.05
Education										
Less than primary										
Primary	0.133	0.276		1.143	53.34	0.301	0.113	***	1.352	57.48
Secondary	0.156	0.319		1.169	53.90	0.625	0.116	***	1.868	65.13
Superior	0.591	0.331	*	1.806	64.36	0.807	0.119	***	2.242	69.15
DK/DA & other	0.807	1.027		2.240	69.14	0.198	0.676		1.218	54.91
Constant	−2.018	0.510	***	0.133		−1.954	0.216	***	0.142	52.56
N	747					6000				
Log likelihood 2	781.503					6576.100				
Nagelkerke R^2	0.280					0.321				
Correct %	74.8					73.8				
Chi-squared	168.057					1640.501				
df	23					23				
p-value	0.000					0.000				

Notes: [1] In 1996, 50.001–100.000; 100.001–400.000; * p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01; dependent variable is the *desire for independence*; percentage of probabilities: Exp(B)/(1 + Exp(B)) × 100.

As for the age group, in 1996, the chances of agreeing with independence increase in some categories with respect to the base group, but in others they decrease, as in the case of those over 74, the only one with statistical significance. It could be a generational effect: The individuals in this group were of military age during the Spanish Civil War. By 2020, the chances of wanting independence increase in all categories compared to the base group. The fact that this group, of those who have lived through the independence process in their teens, has the lowest percentage of secessionists of all, and the fact that the group of 55 to 64 year olds has the highest percentage of secessionists, would nuance the alleged role that has been played in the process of socialization by the media and the education system under the responsibility of the Government of Catalonia—which is in the hands of Catalan nationalists (Miley & Garvía, 2019; Tobeña, 2017). In any case, an analysis of the effects of age, cohort, and period on the will to independence, and considering the main effect of primary socialization will be needed. Thus, in 1996, among young people aged 18–24 and with Spanish as L1, those who agreed with independence were part of the 20.3%. In this same subgroup, in 2020, the pro-independence individuals are 20.7%. But, among young people aged 18–24 and with Catalan as L1, those who agreed with independence are part of the 54.8%. In this same subgroup, in 2020, the pro-independence individuals are 67.2%.

The size of the town of residence is also associated with the will for independence in both years, although with different statistical significance. The larger the town is, the lower the chances of wanting independence compared to the base group are (the smaller towns). This circumstance is linked to the presence of more inhabitants from Spanish immigration in the big cities, most of them surrounding Barcelona, and in Barcelona itself.

Being born in Catalonia significantly increases the likelihood of agreeing or wanting independence. However, probabilities are slightly reduced in 2020. There is also an incremental positive effect when the individual's parents are both born in Catalonia (or at least one parent), compared to those who do not have any parent born in Catalonia. Therefore, the idea that primary socialization becomes a relevant factor as a predictor of secessionism is reinforced. However, secessionism has not grown evenly in both groups. Between 1996 and 2020, in the group of both parents born outside Catalonia, secessionism has gone from 16.2% to 23.3%, an increase of 43.8%. And in the group of those who have both parents born in Catalonia, secessionism has gone from 55.8% to 68.6%, a 22.9% increase.

This data confirms confirm that the most important predictor is L1. If one has Catalan as L1 is much more likely to want independence than if L1 is Spanish. However, the growth of secessionism has been uneven depending on the L1. Among those who have Spanish as L1, percentage has gone from 16.3% in 1996 to 24.6% in 2020, an increase of 50.9%. And among those who have Catalan as L1, secessionism has gone from 56.4% to 73.4%, 17 points, and an increase of 30.1% (Table A1 in the Supplementary File).

Because the marginal effects provide information on which factors contribute most to explaining the dependent variable, the average marginal effects of the exploratory variables are visualized in Figure 1 for ease of interpretation. I show the likelihood of independence given values on the explanatory variables, while holding all other variables at their means.

In 1996, in terms of average marginal effects, the probability of being in favour of independence is the greatest when the L1 is Catalan (23.9%), followed by when the respondent is born in Catalonia (12%) and when they have a high level of formal education (10.6%). On the contrary, when the respondent is older than 74 years, the likelihood decreases (14%).

In 2020, the likelihood of wanting independence is greatest when, again, the respondent's L1 is Catalan (29.6%), when their level of formal education is the highest (14.9%), when they are 55–64 years old (13.2%), when their parents are both born in Catalonia (12.3%), and when they born in Catalonia (10.8%). On the contrary, the likelihood of preferring independence is lowest when the town they are living in has between 50.000 and 150.000 inhabitants (16.3%).

In summary, to have the Catalan language as L1 has the largest effect on preferring independence in both years. However, it must be underlined that in both models where it is included, they only correctly classify 73–75% of cases (see Table 3). Therefore, it means that the rest of the cases (about 25%) should be classified with the concurrence of other variables not included in the model.

A more descriptive approach is useful to complete this analysis. With reference to Table A1 (Supplementary File), in 2020, the profile of the unionists is as follows: 43.9% were born outside Catalonia; 64.2% have both parents also born outside Catalonia; 75.3% have Spanish as L1; 49% have an educational level up to primary; and 24.1% have higher education. In addition, 71.9% have no grandparents born in Catalonia. The profile of secessionists is this: 85.8% were born in Catalonia; 55% have both parents born in Catalonia; 61.7% have Catalan as L1; 32.6% have primary educational level; and 36.3% have university level. In addition, 35.4% have four grandparents born in Catalonia.

From the crosstabulation of the L1 by the will for independence in 1996 and 2020 (in columns), the ENLG for the whole of Catalonia and for the pro-independence and unionist subgroups are calculated (Table 4).

In 1996, the ENLG for Catalonia was 2.15. For the unionist subgroup, it was 1.83 and for the secessionist one, it was 1.88. Both groups were very similar in homogeneity, while they seemed to confront each other like a mirror: more than 2/3 in the dominant group and 1/3 in the minority group, respectively.

In 2020, the ENLG for Catalonia was 2.20. The ENLG for the unionist subgroup fell to 1.67. On the other hand,

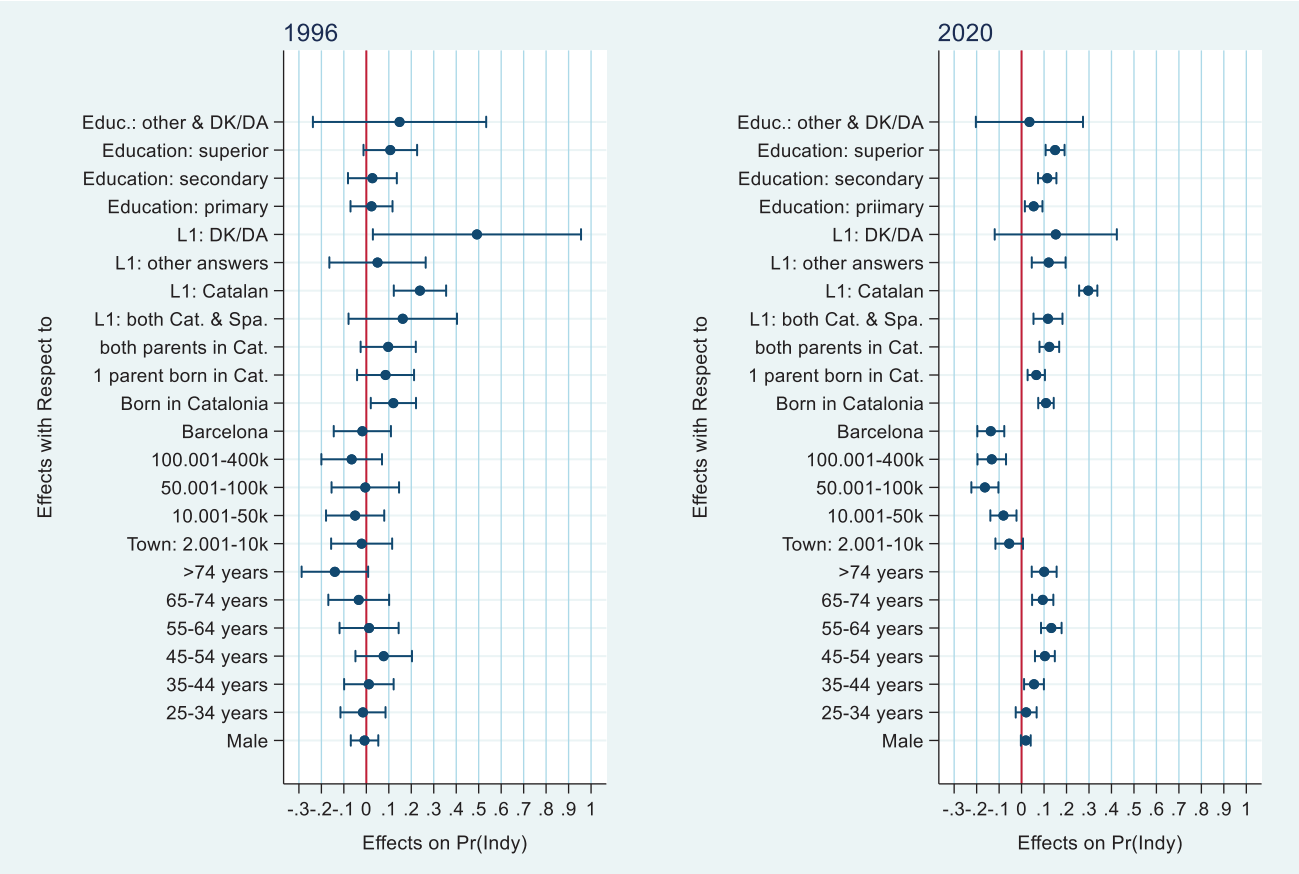

Figure 1. Probabilities of preferring independence. Note: Average marginal effects with 95%. Sources: CIS (1996), CEO (2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

the ENLG for the pro-independence subgroup rose to 2.06. Therefore, while unionism has become more homogeneous with the increase in the percentage of those who have Spanish as their L1, secessionism has become more heterogeneous because it has also penetrated this part of the population.

This double dynamic may show the results of the political strategy followed by the leaders of both blocks. It has been tested that Catalan political parties generally do not use the main identity marker in Catalonia (language) for outbidding purposes and, if they do, it is the unionist parties that resort to it more than the pro-independence parties (Sanjaume-Calvet & Riera-Gil, 2020). In this sense, in recent years, the unionists have increasingly used Spanish in the Parliament of Catalonia; and most pro-independence parties have incorporated some leaders who do not have Catalan as L1.

The growth of secessionism cannot be explained without taking into consideration that the secessionist leadership has promoted a political discourse that it is trying to become rooted in a civic use of the question of language, i.e., the desirability of the Catalan

Table 4. Effective number of language groups in Catalonia (1996 and 2020).

		1996			2020		
		Are you in favour or against independence?			Do you want the independence?		
		Total	In favour	other	Total	yes	other
L1	Spanish	55.2	27.0	69.1	56.4	31.9	75.3
	Both languages	2.0	2.8	1.6	3.8	4.1	3.5
	Catalan	39.9	67.7	26.1	36.6	61.7	17.2
	Other answers	2.5	1.6	3.0	3.1	2.1	3.8
	DK/DA	0.4	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
ENLG		2.15	1.88	1.83	2.20	2.06	1.67

language to become the shared language of the inhabitants of Catalonia, while respecting the language rights of the Spanish speakers, and assuming that in the future Catalan Republic, Catalan and Spanish will have the status of official languages. Without this strong commitment (although it is contested within its own ranks), the secessionist project could be at risk. Catalonia nowadays is a subordinate political community. The plurality of its citizens has family origins outside Catalonia (54.2% of voters have no grandparents born in Catalonia; see Table A1). The L1 of the plurality of the Catalan electorate is Spanish (56.4%; see Table A1). With these two sociodemographic traits, it is wise for the secessionist project to avoid an ethnic outbidding because it could alienate its supporters who are Spanish native speakers and, consequently, it could jeopardize the strength of the pro-independence block.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have used the same logistic regression model with some sociodemographic variables to explain probabilities in wanting independence in Catalonia in two quite different political contexts (1996 and 2020), with the aim to compare change and continuities between them, and to expose some political consequences.

In both years, L1 has been the strongest predictor of those considered. Second, the likelihood of wanting independence depending on whether one has Catalan as L1 compared to Spanish was 77% in 1996 and 80% in 2020, only a low increase of probability. Third, the growth of secessionism has been proportionally stronger among Catalans with Spanish as their L1 than among Catalans with Catalan as their L1. Given the impact of ethnolinguistic diversity on ethnic conflict, after calculating the ENLG for the whole of Catalonia and for the unionist and secessionist subgroups, I can assert that the unionist subgroup has become more homogeneous, while the pro-independence subgroup has become slightly more diverse. It shows that secessionism succeeds in attracting more different people, according to their language (or cultural) background.

These results are congruent with the proposition that despite language being a strong marker of ethnic identity, the language issue plays a lesser role within the whole conflict as could have been previously expected, as both blocks under political confrontation do not reflect strict language alignments.

Cross tabulating the variable L1 with the will of independence within the whole electorate, the weight of each resulting subgroup is calculated (Table 5). This procedure becomes relevant to realize what kind of political dynamics might occur in Catalonia.

The largest group within the Catalan electorate (37.9%) is composed by those who have Spanish as L1 and do not want independence. The second larger one is those who have Catalan as L1 and want independence (26.9%). The third group is those who have Spanish as L1 and want independence (13.9%). The fourth one, with 9.7%, is those who have Catalan as L1 and do not want independence. None of the remaining groups reached 4% of the sample. The third and fourth groups weaken the association between L1 and independence. Moreover, two more aspects have to be underlined relating to the third group: Its weight within Catalan society is not small (13.9%) and its weight within the pro-independence group is quite big (31.9%). In short, although Catalan independence has the support of a great majority of native Catalans, its relative success cannot be understood without the participation of Catalans whose family origins are outside Catalonia. The growth of secessionism this last decade must therefore be explained also by the ability of pro-independence leaders and organizations to make a discourse based on civic-democratic arguments. These arguments have been quite effective in appealing to sectors with a Spanish cultural background and, consequently, to transcend the language borders that unionism could be tempted to consolidate.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Table 5. Crosstabulation L1 by independence (2020).

Overall %		Do you want Catalonia to become an independent state?				
		Yes	No	DK	DA	Total
L1 (L1)	Spanish	13.9	37.9	3.6	1.0	56.4
	Both languages	1.8	1.7	0.3	0.0	3.8
	Catalan	26.9	7.4	1.7	0.6	36.6
	Other languages	0.9	1.8	0.3	0.1	3.1
	DK/DA	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.2
	Total	43.5	48.9	5.9	1.7	100.0

Supplementary Material

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

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About the Author

Jordi Argelaguet is a senior lecturer in the Department of Political Science and Public Law at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, where he teaches undergraduate courses in political science, political parties, and Spanish politics. His main fields of research are nationalism, political parties, and language policy. Between 2011 and 2021, he was director of the Centre for Opinion Studies of the Government of Catalonia.

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Article

Institutional Commitment Problems and Regional Autonomy: The Catalan Case

Francesc Amat [1,*] and Toni Rodon [2]

[1] Institutions and Political Economy Research Group, University of Barcelona, Spain; E-Mail: francesc.amat@ub.edu
[2] Department of Political and Social Sciences, Pompeu Fabra University, Spain; E-Mail: toni.rodon@upf.edu

* Corresponding author

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Abstract
This article examines what constitutional arrangements are more likely to facilitate the transfer of effective decision-making power to the regional level. We show that certain constitutional arrangements can result in institutional commitment problems between regional minority and national majority groups, which in turn influence levels of regional autonomy across regions. Specifically, we examine how the depth and scope of decentralization depend on the presence of federal agreements and the availability of institutional guarantees that make the federal contracts credible. Analyzing regional-level data, we show that regions where identity minority groups are majoritarian enjoy more regional autonomy when the commitment problem has resulted in a satisfactory national accommodation. Our findings highlight two important scenarios. The first occurs when the institutional commitment problem is solved, and regional minority groups are granted substantial levels of regional autonomy. The second scenario takes place when the commitment problem is not institutionally accommodated, and hence regional minority groups have systematically lower levels of autonomy. This article illustrates that both federal contracts and credible agreements are important tools to understand regional decision-making powers.

Keywords
commitment problem; fiscal autonomy; regional autonomy; sovereignty demands; territorial conflicts

Issue
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1. Introduction

The recent Catalan-Spanish territorial crisis provides a good example of how a lack of a credible territorial agreement can lead to an escalation of political conflict. As has been reported elsewhere (Casas et al., 2021; Cuadras-Morató, 2016), the conflict largely stems from the Spanish Constitutional Court ruling in 2010 against several articles of the new Catalan Statute, approved both by the Catalan and the Spanish Parliament and by citizens in a referendum. Many in Catalonia perceived this ruling as a break-up of the territorial agreement between both parties. Consequently, the idea that territorial decentralization was no longer possible through constitutional arrangements and that the only alternative was secession started to gain hold.

The Catalan case is perhaps one of the most recent illustrative examples, but a look all over the world reveals that many current democracies still struggle to find a way to properly accommodate different economic, social, cultural, linguistic, or national realities (Abizadeh, 2021; Bednar, 2011; Beramendi & Rogers, 2020). Political conflicts inside plurinational (or multi-ethnic) states often revolve around the distribution of effective policymaking between central and regional governments. Departing from this pattern, this article takes a fresh look at an

old question and examines what types of constitutional arrangements are more likely to facilitate the transfer of effective decision-making power to the regional level. While the relationship between Catalonia and Spain is one of conflict and many Catalans still seek further autonomy, others like Wales–UK have found a way to settle on a degree of autonomy that satisfies an important part of the electorate. In some other contexts, like in Quebec (Canada), the Basque Country (Spain), or Northern Italy, territorial decentralization has recently increased and, as a result, the territorial demands have partially decreased in intensity. Overall, why are some regions granted more powers than others?

Against the backdrop of many existing explanations, essentially centered around identity-related factors (different language, culture, etc.) or the role of the economy (economic crisis, etc.), we put forward another explanation largely based on the credibility of territorial agreements between regional identity minorities and national majority groups. The transfer of effective decision-making power to regions, we argue, is contingent on the severity of the institutional commitment problem between the national majority group and the minority identity groups in advanced democracies (Abizadeh, 2021)—with the institutional commitment problem understood as the lack of a stable and credible institutional arrangement between the minority and the majority group. More specifically, we propose that in order to understand a region's level of territorial autonomy, one must take into account not only the presence of a federal agreement (decentralization), but also the credibility of this institutional agreement. In a nutshell, we argue that territorial decentralization should be higher in regions that have reached a federal agreement and where constitutional rigidity is sufficiently high as to bestow the agreement with enough credibility.

In contexts where regional minorities exist, the national majority group generally wants to reach an agreement so that minorities' territorial demands cease or are kept at a minimum. The majority group may also want to adopt a territorial model in which any potential secessionist aspirations by the minority group are avoided. In turn, the regional minority group wants to deepen levels of territorial decentralization. Yet, it also needs an important component largely neglected by previous work: a credible agreement. Any decision regarding the territorial organization of the state is likely to be implemented, even without the consent of national minorities. Therefore, without a credible federal pact, decentralization tends to be lower. As the Catalan case illustrates, the majority group can use its position and overturn the degree of autonomy given to the minority group. We posit that the credibility of a federal arrangement is manifested through the rigidity of the constitution—which essentially means the difficulty of reforming the constitution at the will of the majority group.

Our argument is tested using a dataset that contains information on the observed regional autonomy of different regions across different countries. The regional-level dataset, originally compiled by Sambanis and Milanovic (2014), is combined with Lijphart's dataset (Lijphart, 1999), which includes the degree of constitutional rigidity of different countries. The regional and cross-country information allows us to examine our theoretical intuition, that is, whether the degree of observed regional autonomy depends on the existence of a federal agreement and the credibility of the agreement through constitutional rigidity.

Our empirical results lend support to our theoretical intuition and reveal two scenarios of particular interest: In the first one there is a federal contract and the rigidity of the constitutional agreement is high. Under this scenario, regions tend to have high regional autonomy and, as a result of providing credibility to the system through rigidity, the minority group is granted relatively high levels of effective (fiscal) decision-making. The second scenario occurs when there is a federal contract, but constitutional rigidity is low, or when there is no federal contract, but constitutional rigidity is high. In both cases, the minority group is trapped in a situation in which it is not able to expand its regional autonomy, making the system unstable as the majority group can easily revert it.

2. Theory

The literature on territorial decentralization highlights three main groups of arguments explaining differences in levels of territorial autonomy across regions. A first group of studies emphasizes the idea that the choice to decentralize is a function of a country's territorial cultural heterogeneity. Thus, given the existence of a territorial cleavage (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), the institutional set-up is likely to reflect this reality. Needless to say, many countries also engage in a strategy of nationalization, that is, of adopting a single country's culture and making it the predominant one (Keating, 2014; Levene, 2000).

Since Lipset and Rokkan (1967), there has been a lively intellectual discussion regarding what specific institutional arrangements are most appropriate in societies with centre-periphery cleavages (plurinational societies). For instance, in his famous work on consociationalism, Lijphart (1999) defended that consociational institutions were able to satisfy the preferences of both the majority and the minority groups by having cabinets with grand coalitions and segmental territorial autonomy. Consocionalist theory has been debated and scrutinized extensively in previous work (see Andeweg, 2000). However, Lijphart's work has been hugely influential in providing a way to think about how minority and majority groups can coexist within a country. Similarly, the works by Lijphart (1999) and Elazar (1987) revolve around the idea that territorial decentralization, in the form of a federal arrangement, may be a powerful tool to appease the cultural demands made by minority groups. Also, Riker (1964) long strived to establish a general theory of federalism organized around the attempt

to explain both the stability of the federal system and the accommodation of cultural groups. If we apply this idea to the example introduced above, it suggests that Catalonia was granted territorial autonomy as a way to accommodate its distinct culture, language, history, etc.

A second group of studies have employed a political economy approach and have examined the implications of political decentralization on economic outcomes. In particular, these studies have explored the impact of fiscal federalism on the distribution of governmental revenues and expenditures (or vice versa) and whether this distribution has an impact on various aspects of the economy, such as growth. According to this theoretical perspective, the degree of fiscal autonomy granted to the regions is largely a function of economic considerations (for instance, the idea that spending should be close to the region where it is executed). Importantly, a growing literature on fiscal federalism has shown that political federalism does not necessarily lead to fiscal decentralization and that the two types of decentralization may have different consequences for economic growth (Canaleta et al., 2004; Ezcurra & Rodríguez-Pose, 2013; Lessmann, 2012; Rodríguez-Pose & Ezcurra, 2011; Thornton, 2007). Along similar lines, we argue that the institutional provisions of political federalism affect the levels of fiscal federalism.

Extant literature focuses mainly on the effects of granting fiscal federalism on different outcomes, as well as on why fiscal autonomy has been granted in the first place. Rodden (2006) provides evidence that differences in countries' experiences with subnational fiscal discipline can in part be explained by differences in federal institutions. Sorens (2015) shows that central governments facing secessionist challenges try to hamstring regional tax collection. Applying this approach to the Catalan case, this would imply that fiscal autonomy was granted to the region due to economic considerations, such as increasing economic efficiency or an expected increase in economic returns. A version of the economic approximation has also tried to investigate whether territorial decentralization (or the demand for it) increases in the presence of economic shocks. However, this literature has not been conclusive (Bel et al., 2019; Cuadras-Morató & Rodon, 2019). Overall, the economic approach has mainly studied what type of economic factors explain variation in fiscal autonomy granted to the regions or whether having more fiscal autonomy improves (or not) economic outcomes.

A third group of studies highlights that the observed differences in territorial decentralization across regions, countries, and over time is a function of political dynamics and especially of party competition. Early on, Riker (1964) suggested that the decentralization of political parties tends to precede administrative and fiscal decentralization (see also Garman et al., 2001). Its basic idea is that territorial decentralization is (at least partly) endogenous to the party competition dynamics triggered by the territorial set-up. For instance, some work shows that in a multi-layered territorial system, voters face difficulties in attributing responsibilities. This may incentivize political parties to increase their demands for further decentralization (or centralization).

Similarly, other work stresses that, in some contexts, political parties have incentives to emphasize issues on a second dimension of competition (the territorial one instead of the traditional left–right dimension) in order to garner political support. This results in a situation in which political parties strategically invoke the second dimension (the territorial dimension), expressing different opinions regarding the (re)decentralization dimension and trying to win votes by appealing to voters' preferences on this particular issue dimension (Amat, 2012). Applied to Catalonia, this explanation would imply that decentralization to the region was largely granted as a result of political competition, that is, because some regional parties had electoral incentives to demand further decentralization—and some national parties to grant it. Overall, and regardless of the mechanism suggested, the political competition idea is expressed in different forms, but it eventually points to the same outcome: that political competition is a crucial factor in shaping the territorial set-up of a country (Brancati, 2006, 2008; Massetti & Schakel, 2016; Massetti & Toubeau, 2020; Meguid, 2015; Toubeau & Wagner, 2015; Verge, 2013).

2.1. Institutional Commitment Problems and Regional Autonomy

We complement the previous existing explanations and suggest a novel way to understand differences in autonomy across regions. Our argument is based on the logic of the commitment problem between the national majority group and the regional minority groups, and it can be seen as a way of combining previous approaches centered around the role of political competition and institutions. Our intuition builds on the notion that some form of territorial agreement (a combination of decentralization and recognition) explains differences in effective regional decision-making. Thus, we side with the institutional explanations and base our argument on the assumption that identity-related factors are not sufficient to fully account for variation in levels of regional autonomy, but that federal contracts are important tools in explaining this variation. However, we propose that the existence of a federal contract is not enough. In order to properly understand differences in regional autonomy, it is also crucial to take into account the credibility of territorial agreements.

In order to unpack this argument, we must consider the original conditions of these agreements. Territorial agreements (federal pacts) usually take place in a context in which there is a majority group and a minority group (or several minority groups). It is true that, in some contexts, like in Belgium, groups have similar sizes. However, the logic of our argument still applies to these contexts.

These regional minority groups generally belong to different ethno-cultural groups than the majority, although this is not necessarily the case: There are many countries with federal agreements and a low (or absent) degree of national heterogeneity within the country. In any case, this federal arrangement (the federal pact) represents a foundational moment that grants decision-making powers to the region(s).

The territorial agreement, however, is clouded by an important tension, we argue, stemming from a commitment problem. A commitment problem occurs when actors cannot achieve their goals because of their inability to make promises or credible commitments. This common conceptual tool in game theory has also been most famously applied in the field of international relations and comparative politics to understand violence between two actors. Fearon (1995) argued that violence in Yugoslavia erupted because political communities found themselves without a third party that could guarantee agreements between them. In other words, and regardless of what the majority's leaders agree to, there is no solid guarantee that the leaders will not renege in the future using their majority status.

Although the context of territorial decentralization in Western democracies is a very different one, the commitment problem logic is still very much useful in order to understand under what conditions decision-making is more likely to be granted to the regions. Walter (2006) argues that ethnic groups are significantly more likely to seek self-determination if the government has acquiesced to an earlier group of separatists, and if the government is unlikely to encounter additional ethnic challengers in the future. However, her study focuses on scenarios of conflict, and therefore differs from ours. Thus, although territorial conflicts in democracies in the form of violence are also present—see for instance the recent Catalan case (Rodon & Guinjoan, 2021)—these are less common and beyond the scope of this article.

Let us imagine a federal agreement between the majority and the minority group. Although an agreement has been reached, the majority group's first preference is still to keep as much power as possible, and at the same time avoid any potential destabilizing move from the minority group, such as a secessionist threat. Indeed, the majority group might fear that effective decision-making constitutes a slippery slope eventually leading to an increase in secessionist demands. In turn, the minority group oftentimes aspires to a certain degree of territorial decentralization. With no guarantee, the agreement constitutes an unstable one: The majority group can easily use its majority status to overturn the agreement. The minority group knows it and will have incentives to renege from the agreement. Therefore, there is a commitment problem.

Both the majority and the minority groups need a credible agreement—a commitment device to bestow credibility. That is, a guarantee that the federal agreement will not be overruled by the majority group in the future and that the minority group will maneuver within the system. The minority group seeks an institutional tool that limits the tyranny of the majority (Abizadeh, 2021). The institutional enforcement of credible guarantees is the essence of the commitment problem. This guarantee, we argue, is a crucial component of the federal agreement. If no mechanisms are established, the majority group may be tempted to impose a change in the federal agreement at some point in the future. In order to feel comfortable with the institutional set-up, the minority group needs a guarantee that the territorial agreement will not be overruled. If this condition is present, effective decision-making granted to the regions is likely to be higher and hence the "sweet spot" that satisfies both the majority and the minority group is more likely to be reached (Detterbeck & Hepburn, 2018).

We suggest that the credibility of the federal contract—the commitment device—is mainly expressed through the rigidity of the constitutional system. Using the classical definition of Hirschman (1970), one could say that the majority group wants to exercise the voice, strengthen everyone's loyalty, and avoid any potential exit. Conversely, the minority group may be torn between loyalty and exit, but only if certain guarantees are met. The rigidity of the constitution has been shown to be an important factor constraining actors' behavior, and lending stability to the system (Lutz, 1994; Tsebelis, 2002). As explained by Sánchez-Cuenca (2010), the rigidity of a constitution enhances the credibility of the original (territorial) agreement. We argue that the same logic applies to the territorial set-up. When the territorial pact guarantees that the majority group will have its "hands tied" and will not reverse the territorial agreement unilaterally, the federal contract will be viewed as more credible. Therefore, we will observe higher levels of regional autonomy.

It is important to highlight that this process is based on the idea that any decentralization/autonomy is embedded in a constitutional rather than in a legislative framework. Although it is true that legislation can be changed more easily than constitutional (and territorial) agreements, the constitution ultimately determines the model of territorial decentralization. For instance, in the Catalan case, basic legislation can transfer (take back) competences to (from) regions, but the Spanish Constitution ultimately determines what type of competences can be transferred to regions, and the Spanish Constitutional Court interprets the legislation.

All in all, we argue that the credibility of the system—expressed through constitutional rigidity—will enhance the loyalty between the majority and the minority groups. If territorial decentralization is coupled with rigidity providing institutional guarantees, we will tend to observe higher levels of regional autonomy. Yet, if the territorial decentralization is not coupled with rigidity, or the system is rigid without territorial decentralization, the regional autonomy will tend to be lower. Thus, our expectations are the following:

Hypothesis 1: Regions where a minority group is majoritarian will have greater observed regional autonomy when the commitment problem is institutionally channeled with a federal contract and credible institutional guarantees.

Hypothesis 2: Regions in which the minority group' political demands for greater sovereignty are active will have greater regional autonomy when the commitment problem is institutionally sealed with a federal contract and credible institutional guarantees.

3. Research Design

In order to test our theoretical expectations, we employ a regional-level dataset that includes different regions across different democratic countries. The dataset captures differences in the levels of territorial decentralization, as well as in the degree of constitutional rigidity and the relative strength of national minorities. More concretely our database is a combination of the dataset created by Sambanis and Milanovic (2014) and that of Lijphart (1999). While the first one uses primary administrative sub-divisions (provinces, states, republics, departments) of decentralized countries as units of analysis, the second one captures different institutional characteristics at the country level. This set-up is appropriate for our empirical analysis, as it allows us to capture the dynamics of decentralization at the sub-national region as a function of country-wide institutional characteristics. In other words, if we had limited the analysis to country-level data, as much research in the field still does, we would be losing variation and even face the risk of not detecting meaningful empirical regularities.

Our outcome of interest measures the share of regional expenditure that can be financed out of regional revenues. The indicator comes from Sambanis and Milanovic (2014) and can be understood as a proxy for fiscal autonomy/independence. More specifically, it measures the percentage of revenues generated by regional political jurisdictions. Although other measures of regional autonomy are employed in the literature, such as the Regional Authority Index (Hooghe et al., 2016), we believe that the indicator created by Sambanis and Milanovic (2014) provides the best option for our empirical exercise, for several reasons.

First, other measures—most notably, the Regional Authority Index—are constructed by quantifying the degree of autonomy established in the articles on decentralization dictated by the laws—mainly constitutions or basic/general laws. Although this approach has advantages, it overlooks other important dynamics, such as the fact that other laws may provide a different view and change (often to undermine) the level of territorial decentralization. For instance, if one examines articles on decentralization in the 1978 Spanish Constitution, one might conclude that education is solely at the hands of the regions. However, any Spanish observer would quickly realize that this is far from the truth, as the central institutions, via other articles in the Constitution or general laws, have taken back some of the powers or have simply not transferred the competences. Instead, the indicator of the share of regional expenditure that can be financed out of regional revenues shows the degree of economic independence from the center, and thereby the degree of effective policymaking. Political autonomy is more meaningful if regions can finance expenditures out of their own revenues. In contrast, regions that spend a lot out of central government transfers are less independent from the central institutions. After all, the center might adjust the transfer amount and subsequently curtail regional autonomy. For a discussion, see Sorens (2015).

Second, the degree of observed regional autonomy (Sambanis & Milanovic, 2014) is a more accurate indicator to test our theoretical expectations. Other indicators based on laws or constitutions generally show less variation over time. This is mainly due to the fact that, in many contexts, decentralization only translates into constitutional or legislative changes after a period of time. Instead, and since finances—and the financial transfers between the state and the regions and vice versa—are more malleable to the contextual situation, they are overall a good indicator of effective decision-making power, that is, of the degree of observed regional autonomy. Finally, economic and political measures of decentralization tend to be highly correlated. Table 1 shows the summary statistics of the different variables employed in our models.

We also employ several additional indicators—taken from the Sambanis and Milanovic (2014) dataset. First, a binary indicator identifying whether the region has a minority group (1) or not (0). This is based on the difference between the population living in a particular region vis-à-vis the other regions in the country. In other words, a region is considered to host an identity minority group if a national minority makes up more than 50% of the regional population. Second, a continuous indicator capturing the percentage of the largest identity group in the region that does not belong to the largest majority group in the country. And third, we use a binary indicator distinguishing regions where there is a political movement with active sovereignty demands (1) or otherwise (0). Thus, while the first two measures mainly capture the structural conditions of a region in a given country, the third one tackles the political dimension. Decentralization, and its political articulation, may exist due to the sheer existence of national minorities (proxied by the first two indicators) or to political dynamics (third one). The results section will examine all of them.

The degree of constitutional rigidity comes from Lijphart (1999). According to Lijphart, constitutional rigidity is seen as a central explanatory constitutional variable. In his view, rigidity is seen as an anti-majoritarian instrument while non-rigid constitutions without judicial review often lead to unrestricted majority rule.

Table 1. Summary statistics.

Statistic	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Observed regional autonomy	0.61	0.31	0.00	1.34
Lijphart's index of constitutional rigidity	3.08	0.95	1	4
Lijphart's index of federalism	0.58	0.49	1	5
National minority over 50%	0.14	0.35	0	1
% not belonging to majority group	0.22	0.27	0	1
Movement for greater sovereignty	0.27	0.44	0	1
Regional income vs. country's income	0.93	0.32	0.08	2.80
Relative regional population	0.09	0.21	0.00	1
Regional Gini index	38.01	10.49	18.5	69.4

The indicator captures the array of amendment provisions on a four-point scale of rigidity, which ranges from 1 (amendment provisions are amended by an ordinary majority) to 4 (amendment proposals need more than a two-thirds majority or a two-thirds majority combined with other requirements, such as the approval by state legislatures).

On the other hand, the existence of a federal contract is also taken from Lijphart (1999). Specifically, we exploit Lijphart's index of political federalism 1945–2010. Although originally constructed as a continuous indicator, we have made it dichotomous to ease the interpretation of the results. The Supplementary File shows the results with the original indicator in its continuous form. The original index developed by Lijphart ranges between 1 and 5, but we have coded the "Federalism" variable as a dummy variable that takes on the value 1 if the original Lijphart's index of political federalism is equal or greater than 4 and 0 otherwise. We do so because the original formulation of the Lijphart's federalism index is the following one: 1 for unitary and centralized nation-states, 2 for unitary but decentralized nation-states, 3 for quasi-federal nation-states, 4 for federal but unitary states, and 5 for federal and decentralized states. In this original scale by Lijphart (1999), Spain receives the value 3.

All in all, our dataset uses regions as our units of observation. These regions are clustered in different countries and therefore we exploit cross-regional variation in observed regional autonomy as a function of a country's characteristics. This implies that we exploit only cross-regional variation and not temporal variation. The dataset therefore includes one observation per region for the period from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. The countries (and its regions) included in the analysis are: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, India, Malaysia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, US, and the UK—those that are part of Lijphart's dataset. Although the number is small, there is enough variation both within and across countries in our variables of interest. More concretely, our empirical specification is based on the following form:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_1 \text{Minority}_i + \beta_2 \text{Minority}_i \times \text{Federalism}_j + \beta_3 \text{Minority}_i \times \text{ConstRigidity}_j + \beta_4 \text{Minority}_i \times \text{Federalism}_j \times \text{ConstRigidity}_j + \delta X_i + \gamma \text{CountryFEs}_j + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

We estimate several models in which we regress observed regional autonomy at the regional level on the key institutional dimensions that determine the severity of the commitment problem. Most of our estimations include country Fixed Effects (FE). The inclusion of country FEs is important to control for unobserved country-specific characteristics that might also affect regional autonomy. The main quantity of interest is the interaction term between the proxy for the existence of a minority group at the regional level and the two key dimensions of the commitment problem: the presence of a federal contract and constitutional rigidity. The estimations also include standard regional-level controls: regional per capita income relative to the country-wide income mean and the relative regional population as a share of the total country's population. Some models also include a measure of interpersonal inequality for each region. Finally, we adjust for the fact that some countries have more regions than others, and hence they could disproportionately influence the results, by using weights that are equal to the inverse of the number of regions in each country. The standard errors are clustered at the country level in all models.

4. Results

The results section presents the different sets of results in different steps. The first two tables employ two indicators tapping into the structural characteristics of the national minority groups. The third and final table focuses instead on the political side of the story, capturing the presence of political parties demanding sovereignty at the regional level. Table 2 presents our first results. The coefficient of interest comes from the interaction between the index of constitutional rigidity, the existence of a federal

Table 2. Regional Autonomy, Commitment Problem, and Minority Dummy.

	(1) Observed Regional Autonomy	(2) Observed Regional Autonomy	(3) Observed Regional Autonomy
Minority Dummy	−0.42***	−0.31**	−0.21
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.23)
Constitutional Rigidity X Minority Dummy	0.07	0.01	−0.03
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.12)
Federalism X Minority Dummy	−1.82**	−1.03**	−1.12*
	(0.81)	(0.40)	(0.51)
Constitutional Rigidity X Federalism X Minority Dummy	0.48*	0.33**	0.36*
	(0.23)	(0.14)	(0.18)
Regional Controls	No	Yes	Yes
Extended Regional Controls	No	No	Yes
Country FEs	No	No	No
Mean Dep. Var	0.68	0.67	0.67
R^2	0.21	0.32	0.32
N	207	185	184
Number of countries	11	10	10

Notes: Standard errors clustered at the country level in parentheses; Regional Controls: regional income, relative regional population; Extended Regional Controls: Gini; Main components of Federalism, Constitutional Rigidity, and Interaction included but not shown; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

contract, and a minority group—the last two expressed as binary variables. As can be seen, the coefficient is positive and statistically significant. This means that the level of regional fiscal autonomy is positively related to the existence of high levels of constitutional rigidity and a federal agreement. Note, however, that this first approximation does not include country FEs.

Figure 1 eases the interpretation by visually displaying the different relationships of interest (based on Model 3). As advanced in our theoretical section, and looking at the right-hand panel, results show that the autonomy of a region is relatively high when there is a federal contract, high levels of constitutional rigidity, and the minority group is the majority in the region. Thus, given the presence of a minority group, regional autonomy tends to be larger when there is a federal agreement and high constitutional rigidity. Conversely, if there is a federal agreement and the credibility of the federal pact is low (low constitutional rigidity), a region's regional autonomy is significantly lower. The slope of the results in the right-hand panel in Figure 1 clearly indicates, as advanced in our theoretical discussion, that two conditions are needed in order to observe high levels of regional autonomy: high levels of constitutional rigidity and a federal contract.

Note that this also implies one striking and important initial finding: For minority regions, political federalism reduces fiscal federalism—at least in terms of local revenues generated by regional jurisdictions—and constitutional rigidity makes the effect of political federalism in minority regions less negative. This finding is coherent with the theoretical mechanism we propose—the institutional commitment problem. Under political federalism, constitutional rigidity seems to provide the institutional guarantees under which minority groups enhance their levels of fiscal autonomy.

Interestingly, if we look at the left-hand panel in Figure 1, the story is the opposite. When a federal contract is not present and a minority group is the majority in the region, this results in the minority group being trapped in a situation in which there are relatively low levels of regional autonomy. Under this scenario, the system is rigid and hence it is more difficult that the preferences of the minority group are properly accommodated. As a consequence, minority groups systematically enjoy less regional fiscal autonomy and this is exacerbated with greater constitutional rigidity.

In order to corroborate the theoretical expectations, we next run similar models, but in this occasion, we employ the minority size variable. Recall that the minority size variable takes into account the percentage of the largest group in the region that does not belong to the majority national group. While the previous indicator only considered the presence of a minority group (or not), this one adds more nuance and captures the potential "influence" the minority group has in each region. Also importantly, from now onward we include country-fixed effects to account for omitted institutional

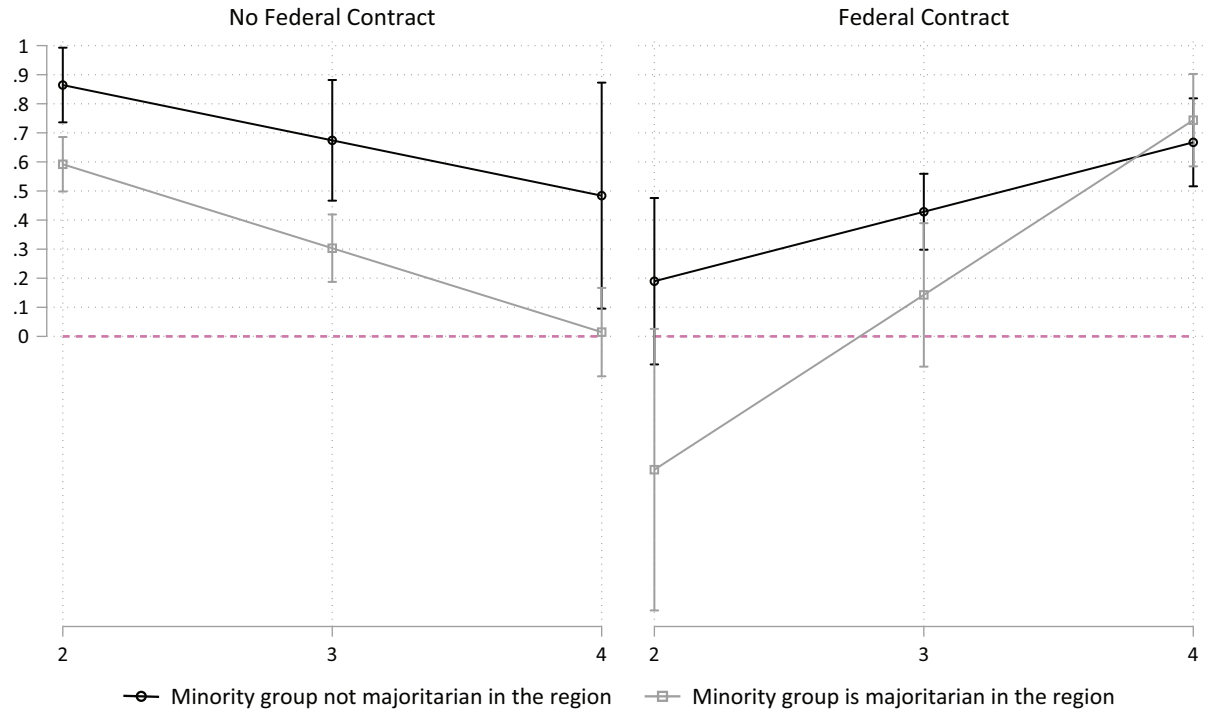

Figure 1. Predicted regional autonomy for minority groups, constitutional rigidity on the horizontal axis.

characteristics. Table 3 shows the results. As can be seen, the coefficient of interest, which is again the coefficient for the interaction term between constitutional rigidity, the federalism dummy, and minority size, is once again positive and statistically significant, very similar to the previous models. This implies that bigger regional minority groups only have access to higher levels of fiscal autonomy when two conditions are satisfied: political

Table 3. Regional Autonomy, Commitment Problem and Minority Size.

	(1) Observed Regional Autonomy	(2) Observed Regional Autonomy	(3) Observed Regional Autonomy
Minority Size	0.65***	−0.97**	−0.42
	(0.00)	(0.39)	(0.91)
Constitutional Rigidity X Minority Size	−0.22***	0.18***	0.03
	(0.00)	(0.05)	(0.23)
Federalism X Minority Size	−1.95***	−1.11***	−1.46*
	(0.39)	(0.14)	(0.67)
Constitutional Rigidity X Federalism X Minority Size	0.48***	0.33***	0.43**
	(0.13)	(0.07)	(0.18)
Regional Controls	No	Yes	Yes
Extended Regional Controls	No	No	Yes
Country FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Dep. Var	0.67	0.66	0.66
R^2	0.71	0.75	0.76
N	188	166	164
Number of countries	9	8	8

Notes: Standard errors clustered at the country level in parentheses; Regional Controls: Regional income, Relative Regional Population; Extended Regional Controls: Gini; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

federalism is coupled with enough constitutional rigidity to provide guarantees for such minority groups.

Figure 2 displays the marginal effects of the minority size indicator as a function of constitutional rigidity and the existence of a federal agreement. As can be seen, the positive slope once again confirms our intuition. When there is a minority group, a federal contract, and the level of constitutional rigidity is low, we tend to observe low levels of regional autonomy. In contrast, the autonomy granted to a region tends to be higher when both things are present—a federal arrangement and the credibility of the arrangement through constitutional rigidity. Overall, the last set of results confirm Hypothesis 1. Note that Figure 2 confirms the striking result that we have discussed before: Regional identity minority groups systematically enjoy lower levels of fiscal autonomy under political federalism unless constitutional rigidity ameliorates the institutional commitment problem.

The final analysis goes a step further and aims to capture the effect of political demands for decentralization on the observed regional autonomy. While the first two indicators captured the structural characteristics of the majority–minority groups, one may wonder whether these characteristics may not be enough. In other words, the sheer presence of national minorities may not automatically imply that there should be demands for territorial decentralization. There needs to be, one could argue, political actors that bring the territorial demands to the fore. Many culturally distinct regions nowadays do not necessarily have regional parties pushing forward demands for decentralization.

With such a logic in mind, Table 4 replicates the analysis, but using a variable capturing the presence, or not, of a political actor with active sovereignty demands. The effect of the three-way interaction between constitutional rigidity, the existence of a federal contract, and the presence of an active sovereignty demand is again positive and statistically significant. Again, we encounter the same logic: Under political federalism, regional minority groups with sovereignty demands are constrained and more likely to have less fiscal autonomy unless constitutional rigidity is also present.

4.1. Empirical Regularities and Implications for the Catalan Case

To illustrate and summarize the main findings, Figure 3 presents the results. More specifically, Figure 3 shows the marginal effects of having political actors at the regional level actively demanding greater sovereignty on observed regional autonomy as a function of constitutional rigidity and the existence of a federal agreement. Looking at the right-hand panel in Figure 3, we see a clear upward slope. This means that, under a federal contract, politically active demands for sovereignty result in greater regional autonomy at the regional level (or at least not lower levels) as long as there is high constitutional rigidity. This is coherent with all the previous results: When regional actors demand greater sovereignty, constitutional rigidity facilitates regional autonomy if there is a federal contract. Interestingly, however, the slope reverses in the left-hand panel of Figure 3 when there is no federal agreement. When a federal contract is absent, sovereignty demands coupled with constitutional rigidity are systematically associated with lower levels of regional autonomy. It is remarkable

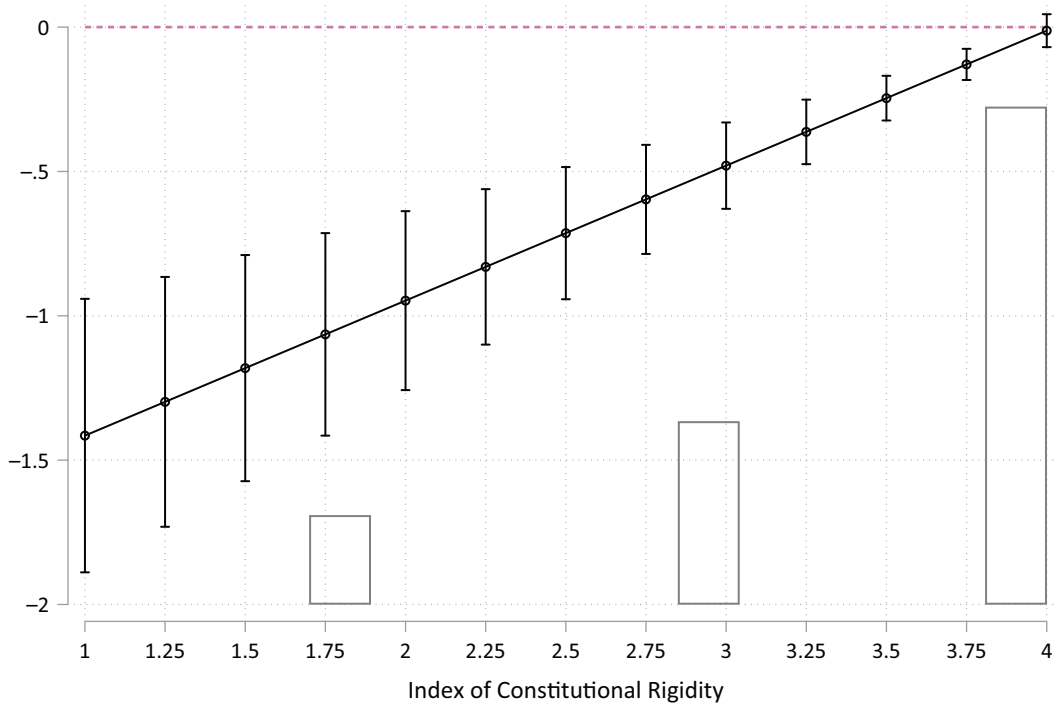

Figure 2. Marginal effects of minority size on regional autonomy as a function of federal contract and constitutional rigidity.

Table 4. Regional Autonomy, Commitment Problem, and Sovereignty Demands.

	(1) Observed Regional Autonomy	(2) Observed Regional Autonomy	(3) Observed Regional Autonomy
Sovereignty Demands	−0.03	0.17	0.17
	(0.03)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Constitutional Rigidity X Sovereignty Demands	0.01	−0.07	−0.07
	(0.01)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Federalism X Sovereignty Demands	−1.14***	−1.05***	−1.01***
	(0.35)	(0.20)	(0.20)
Constitutional Rigidity X Federalism X Sovereignty Demands	0.31**	0.30***	0.29***
	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Regional Controls	No	Yes	Yes
Extended Regional Controls	No	No	Yes
Country FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Dep. Var	0.71	0.70	0.70
R^2	0.72	0.73	0.74
N	247	222	220
Number of countries	13	12	12

Notes: Standard errors clustered at the country level in parentheses; Regional Controls: Regional income, Relative regional population; Extended Regional Controls: Gini; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

to observe that the marginal effect of sovereignty demands on regional autonomy becomes negative when constitutional rigidity is high and there is no federal contact. It implies that regional minority groups are trapped in a scenario in which decentralization is low and rigidity is high, and, therefore, reforming the system is rather difficult for the regional minority group. The reversal of the slopes of the marginal effect of our binary indicator of sovereignty demands on observed regional autonomy are very much in line with the theoretical expectations based on the logic of the territorial commitment problem.

Finally, Figure 4 focuses on the role of having sovereignty demands by showing the overall predicted levels of regional autonomy as a function of having a federal contract (or not) and the degree of constitutional rigidity (horizontal axis). Crucially, we observe in both panels of Figure 4 that, when there are no active demands for sovereignty, the level of institutional rigidity or the existence of a federal agreement have a negligible effect on the degree of regional autonomy. Yet, when these demands are present, the institutional configuration of the federal arrangement is key in granting (or not) autonomy to the regions. Results in Figure 4 are also aligned with our theoretical intuition, hypothesized in Hypothesis 2. If a federal political contract is present and constitutional rigidity is high, the presence of sovereignty claims at the regional level results in relatively high levels of regional autonomy. In contrast, under a federal contract and low rigidity, the regional autonomy tends to be lower. On the left-hand panel of Figure 4 we also observe that the lack of a federal contract, coupled with rigidity, tends to result in low regional autonomy. In other words, regional political claims are associated with lower levels of regional autonomy when there is no federal agreement in place and constitutional rigidity is high.

We believe these findings have important implications, as the Catalan case illustrates. Spain was coded by Lijphart (1999) as a quasi-federal state and at the same time it is a country with relatively high levels of constitutional rigidity. According to the comparative empirical evidence we have presented, this puts the Catalan minority group in a position likely to have low levels of regional fiscal autonomy—as compared to alternative scenarios with a more complete federal deal coupled with institutional guarantees. As such, the institutional territorial commitment problem in Spain, which has, in line with current events, not been properly addressed, might be regarded as one of the key structural reasons behind the rise of secessionism in Catalonia (Casas et al., 2021). In this article, we have shown that the lack of a credible federal political contract makes regional minority groups less likely to enjoy fiscal autonomy. Very much in line with the argument in here, other recent research has underscored the role of information about the institutional design of inter-regional redistribution in shaping preferences for secession in the Catalan case (Hierro & Queralt, 2021).

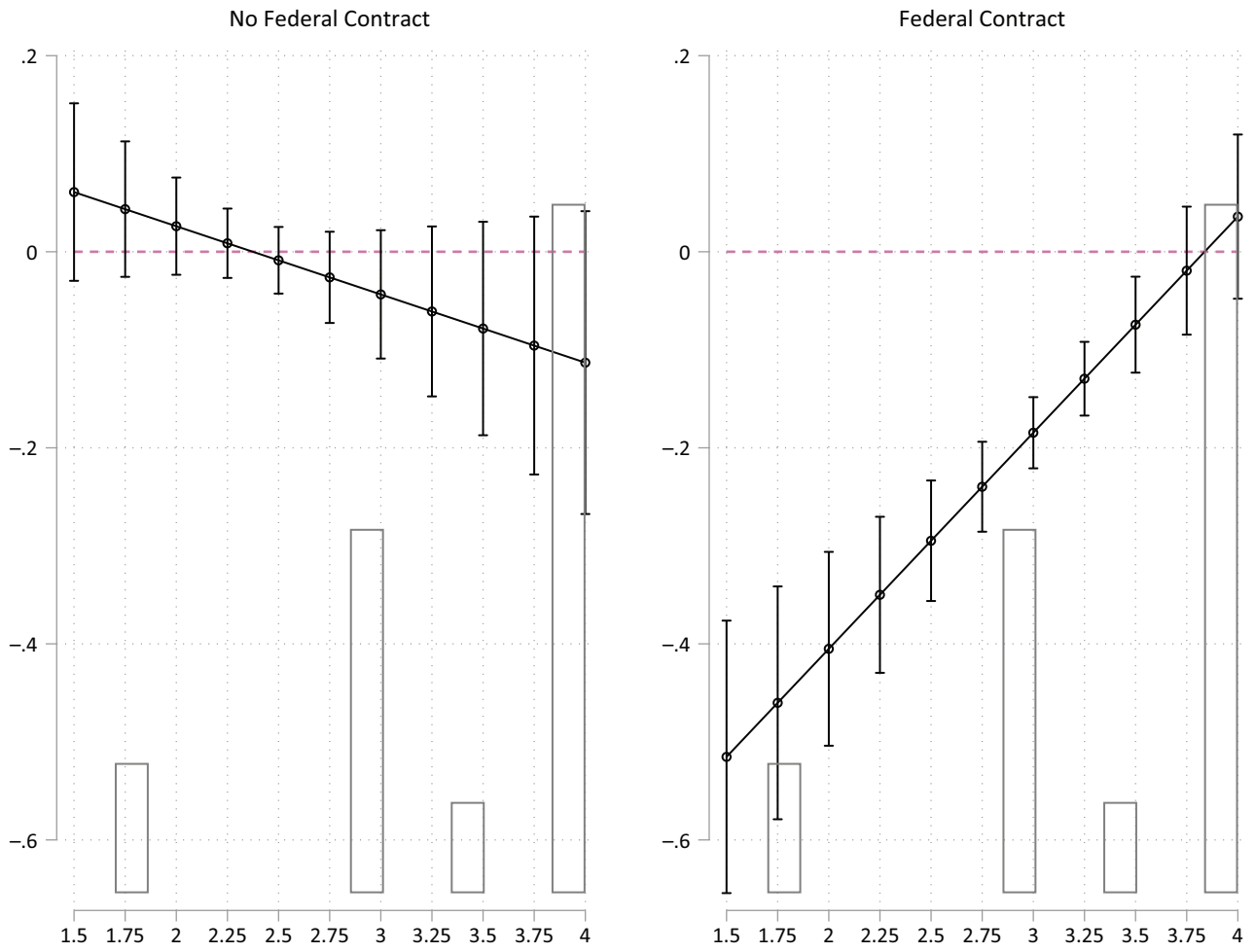

Figure 3. Marginal effects of sovereignty demands on regional autonomy, constitutional rigidity in the horizontal axis.

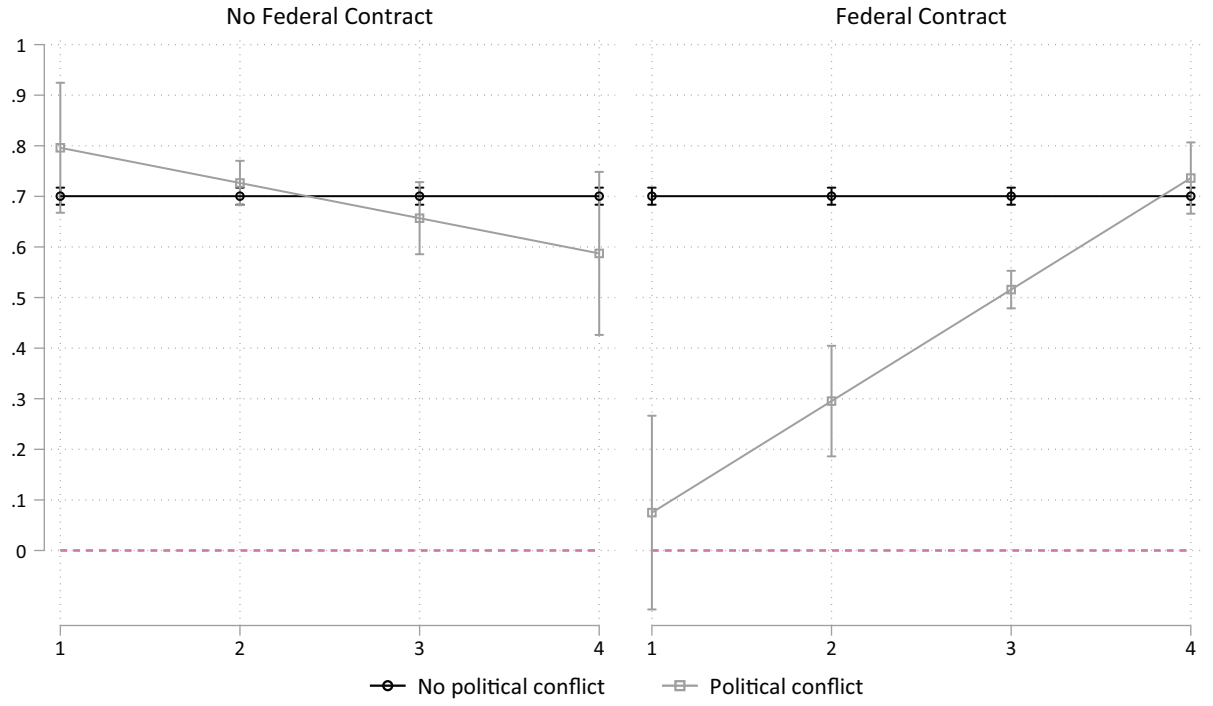

Figure 4. Predicted values of regional autonomy, constitutional rigidity in the horizontal axis.

5. Conclusions

This article has advanced our understanding of what explains variation in political decentralization in several important ways. First, we have argued that existing explanations miss an important factor necessary to understand cross-regional variation in regional autonomy: the credibility of territorial agreements. A federal contract is not enough to guarantee a certain degree of decentralization. The majority and the minority group need to give credibility to the system and they do so through constitutional rigidity. Once both components are present, both the minority and the majority group are loyal to each other, exercise "voice" within the confines of the system and the probability of "exit" diminishes.

Second, we have shown that the logic behind institutional commitment problems is empirically correct and has important economic and political consequences. By exploiting a dataset that captures the degree of regional autonomy, as well as the status of the national minority and the rigidity of the constitutional text, we show that both are key factors in understanding the dynamics of the decentralization. Third, to be more specific, our results show that when there exists a federal agreement and the degree of constitutional rigidity is high, the level of regional autonomy tends to be higher. In contrast, a federal contract without constitutional rigidity, or constitutional rigidity without a federal contract, tend to lead to lower regional autonomy.

Overall, our results highlight two types of situations. The first scenario occurs when there is a federal contract and both the minority and the majority group have given credibility to the system via constitutional rigidity. In such a scenario, regional autonomy is high and the degree of decentralization is high. This scenario is one that can be observed in many federal countries nowadays, such as Germany or Switzerland. Scenarios in which the degree of decentralization is high (federal contract), the majority has its hands tied when it comes to unilaterally reforming the system, and the minority feels comfortable within the system as it enjoys a high degree of autonomy and the tyranny of the majority does not prevail (Abizadeh, 2021). This scenario should be associated with fewer territorial demands and fewer secessionist claims (Gibilisco, 2021).

The second model has different versions, but they share the important characteristic that they result in lower decision-making for the regions. They occur when there is a federal contract, but the constitutional rigidity is low; or when the constitutional rigidity is high, but the federal contract is absent. In such situations, the observed outcome is the same: Regional autonomy is low. Most importantly, the minority and the majority group are trapped in a scenario in which territorial demands are likely to persist. For instance, if there is no federal contract and high constitutional rigidity, some sub-state regions may demand higher autonomy, but the prospects of obtaining it are low since the majority group will tend to block it. This is, for instance, the case of Catalonia in Spain, where any territorial agreement needs the consent of the majority group and where the majority group can overturn important arrangements. In this situation we should expect a much greater prevalence of territorial demands.

We believe our results are important for our understanding of the dynamics of territorial decentralization and secessionist claims. Much previous work has addressed the issue by examining levels of decentralization. However, we have argued, and shown, that the credibility bestowed to the system is an important component to be taken into account. In other words, the territorial conflict cannot solely be addressed via decentralization measures, but through mechanisms that enhance the credibility of the institutional agreements and make it easier for both the majority and the minority group to coexist in the future. The lack of institutional guarantees, or the perception of its absence by regional minority groups, can explain the oftentimes puzzling non-linear relationship that we observe between decentralization and the emergence of territorial demands.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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

Francesc Amat is a Ramon y Cajal fellow at the University of Barcelona. He is also the deputy director of the Institutions and Political Economy Research Group. His main research interests are comparative politics and political economy. https://sites.google.com/site/cescamat

Toni Rodon is an assistant professor at the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the Pompeu Fabra University. His main research interests are political behavior, comparative politics, and political geography. https://www.tonirodon.cat

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Article

Justifying Secession in Catalonia: Resolving Grievances or a Means to a Better Future?

Anwen Elias * and Núria Franco-Guillén

Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, UK; E-Mails: awe@aber.ac.uk (A.E.), nuf@aber.ac.uk (N.F.-G.)

* Corresponding author

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Abstract
This article advances understandings of secessionist strategies by examining how and why secessionist movements make the case for creating a new sovereign state. It draws on new empirical data to examine the ways in which pro-independence parties in Catalonia have justified their calls for the creation of an independent Catalan Republic between 2008 and 2018. The findings challenge the widespread scholarly assumption that secessionist mobilisation is underpinned by grievances—cultural, economic, and political—against the state. We find that arguments for an independent Catalonia rarely include cultural claims. Instead, independence is advocated as a way of resolving political and economic grievances and of creating a better, more democratic, and just Catalan society. Such justifications are highly influenced by the political context in which pro-independence parties try to advance towards secession. These insights advance on extant explanations of secessionist mobilisation by highlighting the distinctive nature of, and the motives for, secessionist claims.

Keywords
Catalonia; grievances; independence; pro-independence parties; secession; sovereign state

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Secessionism in Liberal Democracies: What Do We Really Know About the Explanations of Secessionism?" edited by Ferran Requejo (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain) and Marc Sanjaume-Calvet (Pompeu Fabra University, Spain / Open University of Catalonia, Spain).

1. Introduction

Scholars of secession have generally assumed that secessionist mobilisation is underpinned by a sense of cultural, economic, or political grievance against the state, deriving from perceptions that a national community is being unfairly or unjustly treated in some way. This article challenges such grievance-based explanations of secession by providing new evidence of how and why secessionist movement justify their calls for the creation of a new sovereign state. It does so by examining the discursive strategies of pro-independence parties in Catalonia—Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (CDC), and Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP)—between 2008 and 2018. We argue that whilst grievance-based arguments are a key feature of the case made by these actors for independence, they are also (increasingly) accompanied by arguments that posit independence as a means of creating a better political and socio-economic future for the Catalan nation. Strikingly, and in contrast to the predominant expectation in much of the scholarship on secession, we find little evidence of cultural claims being used to justify Catalan independence. Catalan pro-independence parties' shifting arguments for secession seek to respond to the changing political contexts in which they try to mobilise popular support for independence.

The article advances on recent work on secessionist strategies in two ways. Firstly, it exploits the new Framing Territorial Demands (FraTerr) data set (Elias et al., 2021) on how regionalist actors in Europe have framed their

territorial demands; this allows for a more systematic comparative analysis of secessionists' justification strategies than is provided by existing studies of individual political parties or movements (Abts et al., 2019; Dalle Mulle, 2017; Elias, 2019) and captures the broader range of arguments used and changing strategies over time which other datasets cannot (Griffiths, 2020; Griffiths & Martinez, 2020). Secondly, the article draws on interviews with party representatives to provide the first exploration of the factors shaping secessionist parties' strategies for justifying secession; the analysis thus provides new insights into why, as well as how, secessionists make the case for creating a new sovereign state. As a result, the analysis of the Catalan case presented here significantly advances our understanding of the ways in which secessionists behave strategically to try to shape the dynamics and outcomes of secessionist processes.

In the next section, we review the extant scholarship on how secessionist movements justify their calls for the creation of a new state. The article then introduces the Catalan pro-independence parties that are analysed here and the data on which the analysis draws. The following sections evidence and seek to explain the complex political and economic case made for secession by Catalonia's pro-independence parties, where grievances are complimented by arguments that posit independence as a means to a better, more democratic, and just Catalan society. We conclude by considering the broader significance of these findings: They advance our understanding of the nature of and motives for secessionist behaviour and provide the basis for re-thinking the nature of on-going independence debates in Catalonia.

2. Justifying Secession: Resolving Grievances or a Means to a Better Future?

Secessionist conflicts are often highly polarised, characterised by competing arguments for and against the withdrawal of a territory and its population from an existing state to create a new one. In this sense, secession by its very nature raises the basic question of justification: "The perceived justice of the secessionist cause colours the opinions of potential support of members of the distinct community itself, the central government, foreign governments, and the international community" (Bartkus, 1999, p. 4).

Scholars of secession, however, have undertaken very little systematic study of the specific ways in which secessionist movements justify their calls for the creation of a new state. The focus instead has been on explaining secessionist mobilisation more broadly, and this work makes two assumptions about what drives such mobilisation. Firstly, secessionists are motivated by a sense of discontent with, or grievance against, the host state or majority population (Pavkovic & Radan, 2007, p. 17); a sense of grievance is thus "always present in some way within an argument for secession" (Lecours, 2020, p. 145). From this perspective, secession is understood as a group's response to the perception that "their" national community is somehow losing out from the existing social or political arrangements (Pavkovic & Radan, 2007, p. 47; Sorens, 2008, p. 310). Calls for secession are thus understood to be an expression of discontent or frustration by a territorial community "often bound together by common claims or perceptions of discrimination, neglect, exploitation or repression" (Bartkus, 1999, p. 11).

Secondly, such grievances are assumed to manifest themselves along three dimensions: cultural, economic, and political. Cultural grievances arise from the desire to protect the seceding community's culture (Buchanan, 1991, p. 32). Threats to a community's culture may come from assimilation policies by a state intent on achieving cultural homogenisation, and a desire to preserve cultural distinctiveness in such a context was a key justification for secession in several Soviet republics during the early 1990s (Hesli et al., 1997). Similar attempts at the eradication of Kurdish culture by Turkey over several decades have been an important factor in the mobilisation of Kurds for secession (Bartkus, 1999, pp. 89–91; Sarigil & Karakoc, 2016). In contrast, support for secession in Quebec during the 1980s was driven in part by the belief that French-speaking Quebeckers were not recognized as equal in Canada and that the French language was threatened (Pinard, 1992, as cited in Mendelsohn, 2003, p. 512). Huszka (2013, p. 7) similarly finds evidence of feelings of cultural resentment feeding into secessionist movements' framing of their independence demands in the lead-up to the break-up of Yugoslavia. Whilst these examples indicate that the specific nature of cultural grievances may vary from case to case, scholars have mostly taken for granted that such arguments will be a feature of secessionist discourses given that these groups mobilise in the name of a group which is presumed to be culturally distinctive in some way (Pavkovic & Radan, 2007, p. 18).

Economic grievances arising from the perceived economic differentials between the seceding territory and the rest of the state (Horowitz, 1981, pp. 171–172; Jenne et al., 2007, p. 543) are also expected to feature in secessionists' claims. In relatively richer regions, the frustration is argued to derive from the fiscal deficit between the region and the state, whereby the former pays more in taxes than it receives in expenditures (Hesli et al., 1997, p. 205; Sorens, 2005, p. 310). The presence of such a fiscal grievance has been found to be a feature of secessionist movements' discourses in places like Catalonia and Flanders (Dalle Mulle, 2017). Scholars have also argued that such a perception is an important driver of electoral support for secessionist parties (Álvarez Pereira et al., 2018; Sorens, 2005, 2008). In contrast, in relatively poorer regions, it is the sense of being neglected or exploited that drives secession "despite the costs it is likely to entail" (Horowitz, 1981, p. 174). Huszka (2013) finds, for example, that in the late 1980s pro-independence movements in Slovenia and

Montenegro both argued that economic crisis and bad policies at the political centre were holding back their economic development.

Relatively less attention has been paid to political grievances, which express discontent with the territorial community's political status or rights in some way. In post-colonial contexts, for example, calls for independence have frequently been justified in terms of the denial of the nation's right to self-determination as a result of colonial occupation (Griffiths, 2020, pp. 7–8). In contrast, Saideman and Ayres (2000) have argued that events in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union suggest that groups facing discrimination or denied access to power and resources are more likely to want to "create a state that they control." In other cases—including Slovenia during the late 1980s and Bougainville more recently—there is evidence of secession being justified in terms of basic human rights (Griffiths, 2020, pp. 6–7; Huszka, 2013). Finally, in advanced Western democracies, secessionists have often denounced the political failings of "un-democratic" states which deny the nation's right to self-determination (Dalle Mulle, 2017, p. 154; Della Porta et al., 2017), or which have repeatedly failed to accommodate demands for greater political autonomy (Basta, 2018, p. 1253; Lecours, 2020, p. 152).

Secession has thus generally been understood as a way of resolving grievances, where these arise from perceived unfairness or injustice(s) to which a group is exposed within a state. Much less attention has been given to alternative grounds on which the case for secession might be made. One of the first to do so was Dion (1996, p. 271), who argued that secessionist movements are rooted not just in fear inspired by the existing union but also "confidence inspired by secession" and the "sense that the group can perform better on its own and that secession is not too risky." More recently, new evidence has been brought forward of the importance of the latter kind of justifications for many secessionist movements in Western Europe. This work points to the justification of secession as a means of creating what the Scottish National Party (2019) has described succinctly as a "better future." In their study of social movements' justifications of secession during recent referendum campaigns in Scotland and Catalonia, for example, Della Porta et al. (2017) identify the use of both "diagnostic frames" anchored in perceptions of territorial grievance, as well as "prognostic frames" that posit independence as an opportunity to create new kinds of social and political relationships. A similar finding emerges from studies of the Flemish Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA), whose political discourse both denounces the inadequacies of the existing state of affairs and emphasises a future-oriented message of hope and change (Abts et al., 2019, p. 855; Dalle Mulle, 2017, pp. 217–220). Similar claims have been identified by other work that has analysed the discourses of pro-independence parties in Quebec, Scotland, and Catalonia (Elias, 2019; Lecours, 2020).

This work gives rise to the expectation that secession may be justified in order to resolve territorial grievances, as well as being a means to create a different and better society within the framework of a new sovereign state. In the next section, we explore this expectation empirically with the use of a new dataset which permits a systematic and comparative analysis of the different arguments advanced by secessionist parties in one specific case—Catalonia—to make the case for independence.

3. Justifying Secession: Evidence From Catalonia

Across Western Europe, calls for secession have grown in prominence since the turn of the century (De Winter et al., 2018). Some long-standing secessionist actors have gained unprecedented electoral and political visibility; other autonomist parties have abandoned their moderate territorial positions and shifted to calling for independence instead, and new secessionist parties and civil society organisations have emerged in many places. Catalonia can be considered a paradigmatic example of this general trend: Catalan politics in recent years has been dominated by the question of independence as a result of strong electoral and societal mobilisation in favour of the creation of a Catalan Republic, leading to unofficial independence referenda being organised in 2014 and 2017 (Balcells et al., 2020; Cuadras Morató, 2016).

In this analysis, we examine how Catalan pro-independence political parties represented in the Catalan parliament between 2008 and 2018 have sought to make the case for a new Catalan state. Three political parties are included in the analysis: CDC, which contested elections as part of Convergència i Unió (CiU) until 2015, and as part of the Junts per Catalunya (JxC) from 2016; ERC; and CUP. These parties first secured a majority of seats within the parliament in the 2012 regional election (Rico & Liñeira, 2014). Such a majority was retained in the 2015—when CDC and ERC formed the alliance Junts per Si (JxS)—, 2017, and 2021 regional elections, albeit with some shifts in vote share and number of seats amongst the different parties (Guntermann & Blais, 2020; Hedgecoe, 2021; Martí & Cetrà, 2016). By comparing parties' strategies for justifying secession in a single political context, we can explore variation across secessionist parties and the similarities and differences between them. This is an appropriate strategy for an exploratory analysis which aims to probe how and why secessionists justify their calls for independence (Reiter, 2013). We focus on the period between 2008 and 2018, a decade which encompasses key developments in secessionist mobilisation: ERC's re-assertion of its secessionist position, the two attempts at holding an independence referendum, the Catalan Parliament's unilateral declaration of independence on 27 October 2017, and the subsequent response of the Spanish state (Balcells et al., 2020).

There are, however, important differences between these three parties in terms of their position on

independence. ERC had profiled itself as a secessionist party since the late 1980s, although from the late 1990s it downplayed its call for independence and prioritised the reform of Catalonia's autonomy statute instead (Elias, 2015, p. 82). Independence was re-stated as the party's main goal from 2008 onwards in response to the failure of the statue reform process and strong civil society mobilisation in favour of secession from 2010 (Culla, 2013, p. 670). These developments, as well as the Spanish state's rejection of calls for greater fiscal powers for Catalonia during the early 2010s, also led CDC (then part of CiU, which was created in 1978 as an alliance between two parties [CDC and Unió Democràtica de Catalunya]) to commit to Catalan independence from 2012 onwards; hitherto, the party had advocated for the advancement of Catalan self-government within the Spanish constitutional framework (Elias, 2015). However, the shift in position also created internal tensions that resulted in the formal disbandment of CiU in 2015; CDC was re-branded as Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català (PDeCAT) in July 2016 and joined the JxC alliance in advance of the 2017 regional elections (Gray, 2020). Finally, the 2012 Catalan election was also significant in that it saw CUP—a grass-roots coalition of far-left pro-independence and anti-capitalist groups that had previously only contested local elections (Dalle Mulle & Serrano, 2019, p. 643)—gain representation for the first time.

We examine how these three parties have justified their calls for Catalan independence by using the new FraTerr dataset (Elias et al., 2021). The dataset provides information on the kinds of territorial demands made by regionalist actors in 12 European regions during the period 1990–2018, and the frames used to justify these. The dataset is highly suited for analysing how secession is justified for two reasons. Firstly, it conceptualises frames as "justifications," understood as arguments that add political meaning to an issue or position by providing "a legitimating basis for taking up a specific stance" (Statham & Trenz, 2012, pp. 128–129). Secondly, the dataset proposes a novel categorisation of the ways in which regionalist actors frame their demands as the basis for a systematic and comparative study of this aspect of regionalist mobilisation; the FraTerr coding scheme was informed by the extant literature on territorial politics and refined based on piloting using a sample of political documents from the FraTerr case studies (see Supplementary File). In this respect, the dataset offers a significant advance on inductive qualitative studies of secessionist actors' framing strategies (Abts et al., 2019; Dalle Mulle, 2017; Della Porta et al., 2017; Elias, 2019) and provides for a much broader range of possible cultural, economic, and political arguments for secession than have hitherto been proposed. Thirdly, by further coding the data on frames contained in the FraTerr dataset according to whether they articulate a sense of grievance or justify secession as a means to some kind of better future (see Supplementary File), we provide the first systematic examination of secessionists' use of such arguments. This differentiates our approach from that adopted by the only other dataset of secessionist claims available to date, namely the dataset of secessionist grievances (Griffiths & Martinez, 2020). The latter starts from the assumption that "a grievance is what secessionists typically reference in their claims when issuing a declaration of independence" (Griffiths & Martinez, 2020, p. 581) and proceeds to categorise secessionist arguments according to the kind of grievance invoked; the coding scheme's conceptualisation is thus unable to capture arguments that are not grievance-based. Fourthly, the timeframe of the FraTerr dataset also allows for an analysis of justification strategies over time, in contrast to other work which has focused on shorter periods/phases of secessionist mobilisation (Della Porta et al., 2017; Griffiths, 2020, p. 12; Griffiths & Martinez, 2020).

3.1. Framing Secession: A General Overview

We start this analysis by considering the different dimensions to parties' justifications of Catalan independence, and the extent to which this case is made on cultural, economic, and/or political grounds. Across the pro-independence movement as a whole and over the entire decade analysed, political justifications have been predominant (50.9% of all frames used), followed by socio-economic ones (37.5% of all frames used). This general pattern holds for the ERC, CDC (in its various forms), and CUP, as indicated in Figure 1. In contrast, the relatively limited use made by these actors of cultural arguments is striking, and these are completely absent from the JxS manifesto agreed by ERC and CDC for the 2015 Catalan election. Other types of frames not falling into these three broad categories were also marginal in parties' discourses overall. In general, the case for Catalan independence has thus predominantly been made in political and (to a lesser extent) socio-economic terms, with cultural justifications of marginal importance.

Given their salience, the rest of the analysis focuses on political and socio-economic justifications, in order to understand: (a) the specific types of political and socio-economic frames used over time and across parties, and (b) the extent to which these articulate political/economic grievances against the state or articulate a vision for a better political/economic future. A first impression of the latter is suggested by Figure 2, which shows the relative salience of grievance vs. better future arguments in pro-independence parties' political and socio-economic framings of independence. Just over half of the political frames used posit independence as a means to a political transformation of Catalan society; a significantly greater proportion (65%) of economic frames are presented in this way. This initial finding challenges the focus of much of the secession scholarship on the assumed grievances underpinning such mobilisation; the remainder of the discussion in this section analyses

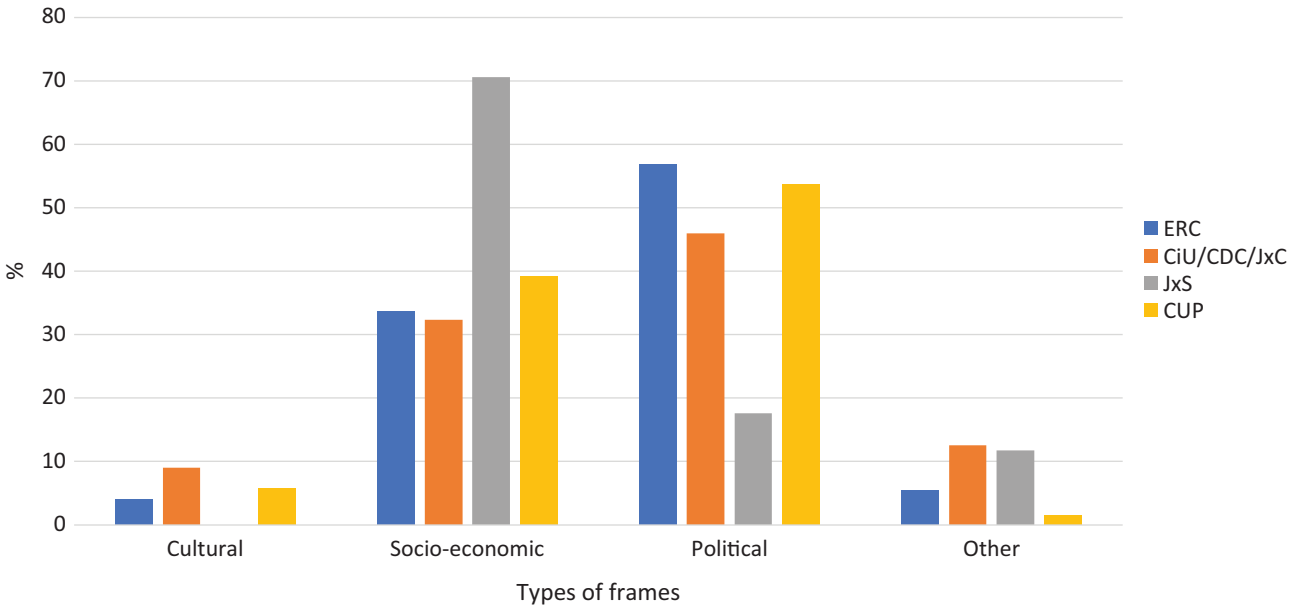

Figure 1. Catalan pro-independence parties' justifications of secession, 2008–2018.

the specific way in which such arguments are deployed in the discourses of Catalan pro-independence parties.

3.2. Catalan Pro-Independence Parties' Political Justifications for Secession

Figure 3 summarises the specific types of political frames used by the pro-Catalan parties between 2008 and 2018. The data points to a clustering around specific types of political arguments. A first observation is that, with the exception of JxS, all parties use arguments expressing discontent with, and attributing blame for, the territorial status quo. Such frames are by their nature expressive of a sense of grievance against the existing territorial arrangements, and their specific content reflect key developments in Catalan politics in the decade being analysed and that have catalysed secessionist mobilisation. For example, through repeated references to the failed reform of Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy and the Spanish government's rejection of a new fiscal agreement, ERC vents its frustration at the fact that "everything has been tried, in vain, to find a fit for Catalonia within the state that respects its national and cultural particularity and allows for its social and economic development" (ERC, 2014, p. 5). Similar arguments are advanced by CDC in its various forms from 2012 onwards, although these remain relatively less used than the other arguments outlined above (7.8% of all political frames used). Both ERC and CDC blame the Spanish state in the hands of successive Spanish

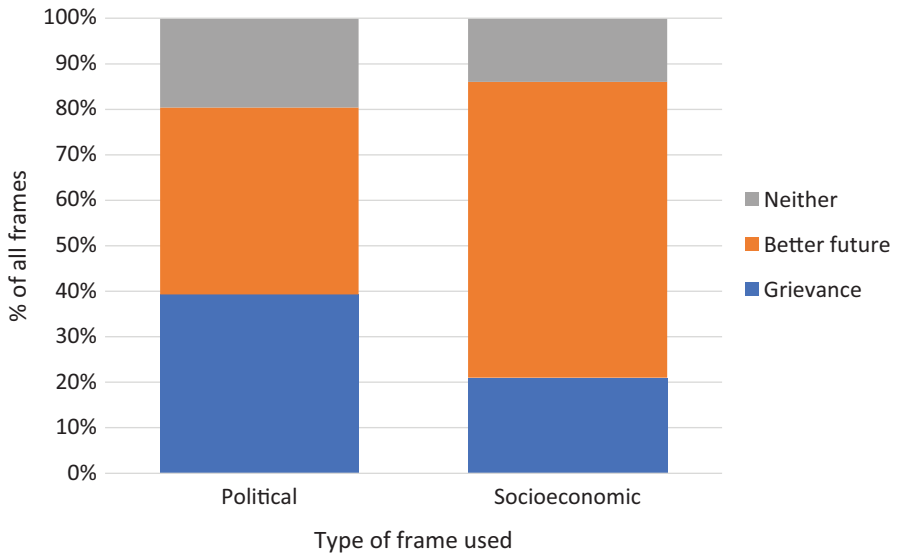

Figure 2. Catalan pro-independence parties' framing of independence as grievance vs. better future, 2008–2018.

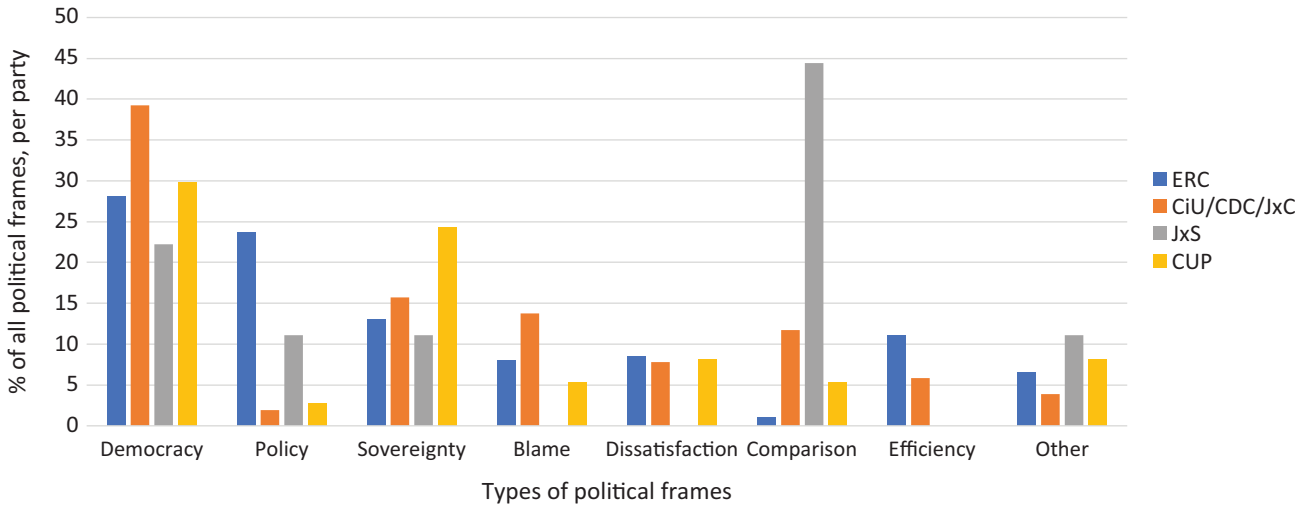

Figure 3. Catalan pro-independence parties' political justifications of secession, 2008–2018.

governments, and (for ERC in particular) Spain's statewide parties who have failed or refused to acknowledge Catalonia's right to decide on how it is governed. In addition, CUP singles out previous Catalan governments for criticism, for their failure to advance in the creation of a Catalan Republic after the Catalan parliament approved a Declaration of Catalan Independence on 27 October 2017 (CUP, 2017, p. 14). In this latter period, ERC also links such criticisms to increased assertions of the sovereignty of the Catalan people and its right to self-determination (see Figure 2). Whilst such claims are present in the party's pro-independence discourse during the 1990s, they emerge more strongly in response to the perceived refusal of the Spanish state to recognise Catalans' "right to decide" in recent years: "The state is a wall that refuses to recognise the sovereignty of Catalonia. No Statute, no Economic Agreement, no independence referendum….We cannot wait any more" (ERC, 2015, p. 2).

However, such dissatisfaction and blame frames are far from being the most used arguments in the Catalan context. Much more important are arguments relating to the quality of the democratic and political system in some way; this is the most used political frame by CiU/CDC/JxC (39.2%), CUP (29.7%), and ERC (28.1%) to justify Catalan independence. On the one hand, such "quality of democracy" arguments are expressed as a grievance against the democratic functioning of the Spanish state, as exemplified by ERC's argument that independence is necessary because Spain's "democracy that doesn't work" (ERC, 2011, p. 131). Such an argument is amplified and expressed more harshly by CUP from 2012 onwards, with criticism of Spain's failing democracy repeatedly employed to advocate "rupture" from the repressive "laws of the 1978 Spanish Constitution and the monarchic regime inherited from the Franco period" (CUP, 2015, p. 7).

On the other hand, arguments making reference to the "quality of democracy" can also be framed more positively, and there is evidence of parties increasingly focusing on the democratic credentials and potential of a future Catalan Republic. For example, both ERC and (especially) CDC argue repeatedly for the legitimacy of such a Republic given the democratic process through which it is being created: "For the first time in many years a clear majority of Catalans, through the force of their votes, has given the Catalan parliament a clear mandate: to start the process of building Catalonia's own state" (CiU, 2015, p. 12). Both parties, but ERC most consistently, also justify independence in terms of the opportunity it provides to create a different and better democracy: "A Catalan Republic is an opportunity to build a different way to do politics based on the right to decide and a collaborative democracy in which all citizens become responsible for the good functioning of the Republic" (ERC, 2017, p. 91). As implied here, both ERC and CDC also frequently posit a link between the democratic credentials of an independent Catalonia and giving voice to a "sovereign" Catalan people; in this respect, independence equates to granting Catalans their right to "take our own decisions" (CiU, 2012, p. 12). Such themes were also a key feature of the joint manifesto agreed by the JxS coalition in 2015, and which set out a positive vision of "the Republic that we want" (JxS, 2015, p. 10).

Our data also evidences the additional ways in which Catalan pro-independence parties have sought to make a clearer, more detailed, and positive case for independence. In particular, novel justifications that focus on the specific policy opportunities for a future independent Catalonia are deployed. In ERC's case, these are captured by the "policy" frame where specific policy goals are identified as ones that can be achieved as a result of independence; these account for 23.6% of all political frames used by the party in this period. Such arguments serve to set out the specific policy innovations that a Catalan Republic would pursue, often framed in terms of the "transformation" of Catalan society (ERC, 2017, p. 94) and the pursuit of a "new," "different," or "our

own" model of policy-making (ERC, 2012, 2017). In a similar vein, arguments about "efficiency" are also deployed (accounting for 11.1% of all political frames used), to imply that independence will enable greater efficiency in all aspects of political decision-making:

> We need our own state to build a new Catalonia, with an agile and efficient public administration, with simple operational structures and at the same time coordinated with all other parties involved in the management of cultural heritage, from tourism, education, public works and urbanism etc. (ERC, 2012, p. 163)

Albeit in more general terms, CUP deploys a similar line of argument bound up with the notion of Catalan sovereignty, a frame which accounts for 24.3% of all political frames used by the party. It thus argues for a post-independence "programme of popular sovereignty, that is, not subject to any power other than the voice of the people to decide on everything that affects us: politics, energy, food, urbanism, health, education etc." (CUP, 2017, p. 46).

3.3. Catalan Pro-Independence Parties' Socio-Economic Justifications for Secession

Figure 4 summarises the specific types of socio-economic frames used by pro-independence Catalan parties to justify independence. For the whole period analysed, arguments referring to social justice predominate. Such a frame is the most used by CiU and its successors as well as by ERC and CUP; it is only in the JxS 2015 manifesto that another frame—economic prosperity—is more salient. Beyond this general trend, however, justifications on the basis of social justice also take different forms.

On the one hand, for CUP and ERC a key theme is independence as a solution to the perceived social injustices caused by Catalonia's position within the Spanish state. For the former, these derive from a system of "capitalism that generates misery and a patriarchy which imposes inequality" (CUP, 2015, p. 1). In this vein, the party's frequent use of "crisis" frames (see Figure 3) reflects its argument that the 2008 financial crisis has made independence even more necessary as the only means of achieving "social emancipation" (CUP, 2017, p. 2). In contrast, for ERC a persistent grievance in this respect is linked to so-called "fiscal plundering," whereby the Spanish government is repeatedly denounced for extracting more economic resources from Catalonia than the region received in investment and services (ERC, 2008, 2011, 2017). The general goal of creating a more just and equal society, where Catalans can "live better" (ERC, 2012, p. 39), is re-stated in the context of the financial crisis at the end of the 2000s, in the following terms:

> The crisis of the fiscal deficit prevents us from positioning ourselves as a rescue country, a country with a surplus, a country with levels of work and well-being according to the work and the wealth we know how to produce….We are [for]… a Catalan Republic… with tools and resources to solve the crisis, create jobs and build a welfare state. (ERC, 2011, p. 4)

However, alongside this grievance-driven discourse—and increasingly from the mid-2010s onwards—all parties seek to advance a more positive vision of post-independence Catalonia that places social transformation at its core. For example, a common theme in ERC's manifestos is that "the purpose of having our own state is to guarantee the quality of life of all Catalans and improve their social wellbeing" (ERC, 2012, p. 909). CiU and its successors and (especially) CUP go even further in arguing that independence and social transformation are inextricably linked: "They are two processes that are inseparable one from the other" (CUP, 2012, p. 1; see also CDC, 2016; CiU, 2012, 2015; JxC, 2017). This shift of emphasis is supported with a shared commitment to,

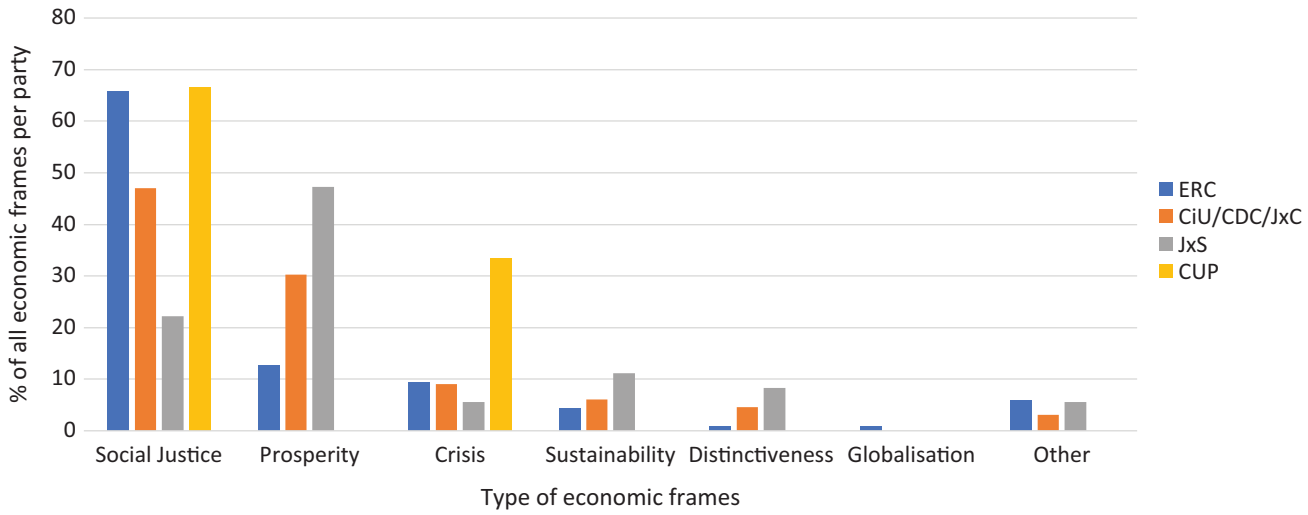

Figure 4. Catalan pro-independence parties' socio-economic justifications for secession, 2008–2018.

for example, securing gender equality, a guarantee of social rights, and a better quality of life in a future Catalan Republic. However, it is in ERC's manifesto for the 2017 Catalan elections that most detail is provided on "the model of Republic that we want" (ERC, 2017, p. 8) with a key priority being "policies… aimed at making a reality a Catalan Republic with worthy public services, that represents a better quality of life for all citizens and that adopts a model that fights against structural poverty" (ERC, 2017, p. 10).

After social justice frames, those referring to economic prosperity are the most used, albeit to different extents by different parties. For example, they account for 33.3% of the socio-economic frames used by CiU and its successors, and the most used frame in the JxS manifesto. In contrast, they are much less used by ERC during this period (12.8% of all socio-economic frames) and are completely absent from CUP's discourse. There are also important differences in how such arguments are used. On the one hand, and as with social justice frames, there is a tendency to use them in conjunction with a critique of central government (and, to a lesser extent, EU) economic policies in the region. In particular, and especially in the context of the financial crisis, ERC takes issue with the impact on the productivity of the Catalan economy. On the other hand, the issue of prosperity is also invoked in parties' more recent efforts to map out their vision for a future Catalan Republic. Both ERC and CiU thus advance a common argument that independence can lead to greater prosperity, with the former also frequently linking this to achieving social justice. As suggested above, JxS is also distinctive in emphasising the economic viability of a future Catalan Republic based on the experiences of other comparably-sized countries:

> Most economic indicators demonstrate Catalonia's ability to be at the forefront of economic progress, not only on a European scale, but also globally and that is why we can say that….Catalonia already has the full capacity to get by on its own. (JxS, 2015, p. 17)

4. Discussion: Explaining Catalan Secessionists' Justifications of Independence

The analysis in the previous section evidenced the ways in which justifications of secession vary across different pro-independence parties and over time. Nevertheless, two general trends can be identified. Firstly, secessionist discourses feature arguments for independence that express both grievances against the Spanish state and a positive vision for a future Catalan Republic; the latter also become more prominent over time and are a particularly salient feature of secessionist discourses during the 2010s. This finding challenges the assumption in much of the scholarship that secession is mobilised exclusively or primarily by perceptions of territorial grievance, as argued in Section 2. Secondly, such justifications—whether grievance-focused or future-orientated—draw almost entirely on political and economic arguments. Little consideration is given to the cultural dimension that is generally assumed by scholars to be a key dimension of secessionist mobilisation. In this section, we draw on interviews with party representatives to explore the factors that shape the types of arguments secessionists use to make the case for independence (for further detail on the interviews undertaken, see Supplementary File). Three factors emerge as being particularly significant.

Firstly, public opinion in relation to secession arguably pushes parties to play down some justifications for secession and emphasise others. In the words of one CDC interviewee, "you position yourself politically based on the demands that exist in society" (CDC interview, 12 March 2020). This is not surprising given that, in established democracies, majority support is usually a necessary (but not always sufficient) condition for secession (Dion, 1996; Lecours, 2020). Thus, for example, interviewees pointed to the constraints arising from the specific nature of the Catalan electorate, reflecting its highly diverse composition as a result of high levels of Spanish and international migration into the region during the twentieth century. In such a context, justifying secession using cultural arguments (especially those relating to the Catalan language) is also very risky since "all citizens must vote and… placing language issues on the political agenda can be divisive." In contrast, justifications that appeal to all "citizens of Catalonia" are much more likely to have broad appeal (ERC interviews, 2 and 4 March, 2020). The down-playing of cultural arguments is thus a deliberate strategy in spite of the fact that, in contemporary Catalan society, issues of language shift and normalisation remain major challenges (ERC interview, 2 March 2020). Interviewees from all parties also noted that an increase in social discontent after the 2008 financial crisis incentivised the greater use of social justice arguments for secession in recent years. At the same time, strong popular disillusionment with the failure of the statute reform process from 2010 onwards also informed parties' emphasis of arguments expressing dissatisfaction with the state's failure to accommodate Catalonia within Spain and those asserting the legitimacy of efforts to advance independence via democratic means. Such a context also informed the use of arguments asserting Catalonia's "right to decide" for itself on how it should be governed since "this went down well with people" opposed to Catalonia's treatment by Spain but not supportive of Catalan independence (CDC interview, 13 March 2020).

But we also find evidence of the role of public opinion may play in shaping parties' emphasis of grievance or future-orientated arguments. For example, we note in Section 3 the grievances articulated in relation to Catalonia's fiscal deficit relative to the rest of Spain. Mostly found in ERC's manifestoes, the party's interviewees also noted the strong pressure to re-frame their discussion of this issue in the context of a diverse Catalan electorate as described above. In particular in the eyes of

voters who still have family links in other parts of Spain, "talking about the fiscal deficit is problematic [because] there's a danger that they say we lack solidarity" with Spain's poorer regions (ERC interview, 4 March 2020). Others expanded on this logic by noting that "we have made the issue more positive by saying what we could do with [more fiscal resources], we could provide more social policies" (ERC interview, 2 March 2020).

Secondly, the necessity to differentiate a party from pro-independence competitors also has a bearing on how calls for independence are framed: "When new actors appear with whom you have an electoral border and you're competing, yes, it can make you change your message" (ERC interview, 4 March 2020). Party ideology was cited by several interviewees as one basis on which such differentiation could be established. On the one hand, parties distinguish themselves by their left-right positions. Both ERC and CUP position themselves as left-wing parties and compliment their commitment to Catalan independence with the pursuit of "social justice and equality" (ERC, 2012, p. 7) and "socialist transformation" (CUP interview, 1 May 2020). In contrast, CDC's greater emphasis of economic prosperity frames arguably reflects the centre-right ideological profile of the federation—CiU—that it belonged to until 2015 (Barrio & Barberà, 2006); an interviewee from PDeCAT thus noted his party's preference for talking about Catalan independence using a "different language" to that of the left, one that emphasises the "conditions for investment and the conditions for prosperity" that Catalonia offers (PDeCAT interview, 2 March 2020). On the other hand, CUP's distinctive anti-system values provides a further means of differentiating itself from ERC on the left of the political spectrum. CUP's framing of independence—and its reliance on grievance-based arguments articulating dissatisfaction with the Spanish political system—reflect its positioning as an anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist party. From this perspective, the party's calls for "democratic rupture as the only real possibility of accessing sovereignty" (CUP interview, 1 May 2020) is a very distinctive discourse to that espoused by ERC which, as a party in (or aspiring to) regional government, has sought to prioritise a "more mature" discourse that departs from a position of respect for "democratic principles" (ERC interview, 2 March 2020).

Thirdly, the prospect of holding a referendum on independence creates an incentive for secessionist parties to articulate a more detailed and positive case for creating a new state. As argued by Lecours (2020, p. 144), "a central aim of secessionist actors during an independence referendum campaign is to convince members of the minority national community of the desirability of secession." That such a pressure was felt by the parties examined here is most clearly expressed by ERC interviewees who referred to the 2012 Catalan election as a turning-point in the party's discursive strategy. With the election of a pro-independence majority of Catalan representatives, the party's focus shifted onto creating a "programme of state" that set out in detail the policy innovations that would be pursued in a future Catalan Republic; this strategy aimed at "the social growth of independence with a view to a hypothetical referendum" (ERC interview, 2 March 2020).

Justifying secession in such terms also makes strategic sense given that studies of referendum campaigns in Quebec and Scotland have suggested that pro-independence parties are usually confronted with risk-averse voters who tend to favour the constitutional status quo (Liñeira & Henderson, 2019; Nadeau et al., 1999) and political parties opposed to secession whose campaigns tend to focus on the risks and high costs of such a decision (Lecours, 2020; Mitchell, 2016). However, the Catalan case differs from these examples in a key respect: Whilst the UK and Canadian governments did not question the legitimacy of the referendum, the Spanish government has strongly contested the legality and constitutionality of such efforts (Balcells et al., 2020). In particular, interviewees noted the Spanish government's suspension of Catalan autonomy in October 2017 after a unilateral declaration of independence was approved by the Catalan parliament, as a fundamental change in the context in which the case for secession had to be made: "We stopped fighting for independence and started for democracy" (CUP interview, 5 March 2020). Whilst all pro-independence parties inevitably framed such a decision using arguments strongly critical of the state's approach and (as noted in Section 3) re-asserted Catalonia's democratic "right to decide," there were also important differences between them. On the one hand, ERC preferred to reiterate its "positive message" aimed at reinforcing an electoral and social majority in favour of independence (ERC interview, 2 March 2020); on the other hand, JxC and (in particular) CUP have retreated from such a better future narrative in an attempt to tap into growing disenchantment with the Spanish political system: "We believe that we must make a speech not about implementation of the Republic, but about a new clash with the state" (CUP interview, 5 March 2020). The Catalan experience thus suggests that a third factor shaping pro-independence parties' justifications of secession is the political context in which a referendum on independence is pursued.

5. Conclusion

In undertaking a systematic analysis of Catalan pro-independence parties' justifications of independence using newly available data, this article provides for a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of and motives driving secessionists' strategic behaviour. Our findings demonstrate that, in their political discourses, secessionists deploy justifications focused on grievances against the state alongside arguments that posit independence as a means to a better political and economic future for the territory. Any case for independence arguably must, of necessity, articulate a sense of

grievance with the status quo in order to justify why radical change is necessary; however, such grievance-based arguments are not always sufficient to mobilise public support for the creation of a new sovereign state. The analysis of the Catalan case provides new insights into the different political pressures that come to bear on pro-independence parties at different phases of secessionist mobilisation. As a result, secessionists' justifications for independence are more complex and contextual than has hitherto been acknowledged: arguments shift across actors and over time in response to the specific political conditions in which secessionist mobilisation occurs. In order to further probe such dynamics, future research should focus on expanding the scope of empirical analysis beyond the Catalan case.

The empirical findings also provide grounds for re-thinking the drivers of secessionist mobilisation in Catalonia where grievance-focused explanations continue to predominate. In his account of the rise of the pro-independence movement, for example, Dowling (2017, p. 88) notes that "the intense mobilisation of Catalan independence is inexplicable without national identity as an explanatory variable….As an untried political solution to the grievances of Catalonia." A similar explanatory role for identity-based grievances is posited in other work. However, the analysis presented here finds that secessionist parties themselves have sought to present the case for Catalan independence in very different terms. Future research should expand the empirical analysis beyond pro-independence political parties to explore the extent to which these findings hold for the Catalan pro-independence movement more broadly.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

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

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About the Authors

Anwen Elias is a reader in politics at the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University. Her research interests are comparative territorial politics and regionalist and secessionist movements in Europe. She is currently leading projects on regionalist movements' framing of their territorial demands (funded by the EU's Horizon 2020 programme) and grassroots engagement with debates about secession (funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council).

Núria Franco-Guillén is a post-doctoral fellow at the Department of International Politics (Aberystwyth University) and a member of the Interdisciplinary Research Group on Immigration (Universitat Pompeu Fabra). Her research has focused on immigration discourses in stateless nations, deliberative democracy, and regionalist movements' framing of their territorial demands. Her current work focuses on grassroots engagement with debates about secession (project funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council).

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Article

The Democratic Legitimacy of Secession and the Demos Problem

José L. Martí

Department of Law, Pompeu Fabra University, Spain; E-Mail: joseplluis.marti@upf.edu

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Abstract
The normative literature on secession has widely addressed the question of under which conditions the secession of a particular territory from a larger state might be regarded as justifiable. The idea of a normative justification of secession, however, remains ambiguous unless one distinguishes between the justice of secession and its legitimacy, a distinction that is now widely accepted in political philosophy. Much of the literature seems to have focused on the question about justice, while, in comparison, very little attention has been paid to the question of under which conditions secession can be regarded as democratically legitimate, as something explicitly different to the question of justice. This article addresses this second question. After some preliminary remarks, the article focuses on the main obstacle to develop a theory of democratic legitimacy of secessions, the so-called "demos problem." Such problem, it is argued, has no categorical solution. This does not imply, however, that there is no democratic, legitimate way of redrawing our borders. Two strategies are proposed in this article to overcome the difficulty posed by the demos problem: an ideal strategy of consensus building and a non-ideal strategy of decision-making in the circumstances of disagreement.

Keywords
all-affected principle; all-subjected principle; consensus; constitution; democracy; demos; legitimacy; referendum; secession

Issue
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1. Introduction

The normative literature about the justice of secession is extensive and diverse. Nationalist theories (e.g., Kymlicka, 2001; Miller, 1998, 2003; Moore, 1997), remedial theories (Buchanan, 1991, 1997), plebiscitary theories (Beran, 1984; Philpott, 1995; Wellman, 2005), and mixed theories (Bossacoma, 2020; Catala, 2017; Lefkowitz, 2008, 2018; Patten, 2014; Weinstock, 2000, 2001) have all tried to answer the question of under which circumstances we might regard the secession of a particular territory from a larger state to be justifiable. This idea of a normative justification of secession, however, remains ambiguous unless one clearly distinguishes between the justice of secession and its legitimacy, a distinction that is now widely accepted in political philosophy. This literature on just secession has been regarded as a special case within the larger literature on self-determination and territorial rights (e.g., Brilmayer, 1991; Stilz, 2018). Surprisingly, very little has been said about the legitimacy of secession. It is true that some of the theories of secession, especially the plebiscitary ones, have been casted in terms of a consent-based notion of authority. Even in those cases, it is not clear if the principles they invoke are really incompatible with the views defended by those who have focused on the justice of secession, that is, it is not clear to what extent they are all participating in the same debate and really discussing each other's claims. In most cases, the notions of justice and legitimacy are conflated, or treated as equivalent or synonymous, or they are not sufficiently distinguished (e.g., Dalle Mulle & Serrano, 2018; Pérez, 2021; Pérez & Santjaume, 2013; Santjaume, 2020). And yet, these two notions refer to two very different questions.

This article aims at providing a preliminary theory of the legitimacy of secession, and more particularly a democratic one. The main claim of such theory is that secession is legitimate insofar as it is democratically agreed or decided. This broad claim is compatible with very different understandings of what may count as a democratic agreement or decision, and, even more relevantly, with diverse views about who should decide or agree on the secession of a particular territory, in other words, with which is the relevant people or demos to the effect of the democratic legitimacy of that secession. This last issue is what in the literature has been often called the *demos* problem (Dahl, 1970, 1991) or, more recently, the boundary problem (Arrhenius, 2005), and it is often regarded as a problem or dilemma that democracy itself is not able to solve (Schumpeter, 1942, Chapter 20). This does not imply, however, as Joseph Schumpeter famously assumed, that democratic legitimacy should be indifferent to any form of determination of the demos. As I will argue, there is no categorical or knocking-down argument by virtue of which we can settle a democratic solution to the demos problem. However, this fact has important practical implications for the way we can democratically approach real territorial conflicts.

One of my assumptions is that there might be certain conditions under which the secession of a territory from a larger, existing state may be just and legitimate. If, alternatively, we presumed that all secessions are always unjust and illegitimate no matter what and took our borders to be unalterable, we would be giving the status quo a preeminence that it does not deserve, especially considering that such status quo has emerged mostly in an arbitrary way. I do not think this view is plausible, but I will not argue for this here. Let me just take for granted the premise that borders might, under some conditions, be redrawn in a just and legitimate way throughout processes of integration, supercession, or secession.

There is another preliminary issue that I should clarify. Much of the literature about just secession is casted in terms of whether there is a right to secede or not. Powerful as it often is, the language of rights might be of little help here. First of all, since my main focus in this article is the political morality of secession, the legalistic language might be confusing. I will not say anything for instance about whether, as a matter of fact, there is a legal right to self-determination recognized by international law that might support the aspirations of certain secessionist movements under certain circumstances. The language might be confusing because it might give the impression that if *x* has a right to secede from *y*, at least in some circumstances, this means that *x* might unilaterally exercise such a right without further agreement or negotiation with *y*, which is, as we will see, hardly the case. And it might also give the impression that from the claim that *x* has a moral right to secede from *y* in circumstances *c*, we can infer that *x* should have a legal or constitutional right to do so. But this of course does not follow. The legal discussions about international law (see for instance Lefkowitz, 2018) or about the constitutionalization or legalization of a right to secede (Sunstein, 1988; Weinstock, 2001) are at least partially independent from the issues of political morality on which I will focus in this article that determine under which circumstances secession might be permissible.

In the next section, I will start by distinguishing between justice and legitimacy to pave the way for my argument in the rest of the article. In Section 3 I will present the main claim of the theory of democratic legitimacy of secession and the demos problem that emerges from it. I will also analyze the two main normative principles that have been proposed to solve this problem, showing that none of them provides a real solution to it in a case of potential secession. This will allow me to distinguish between two different questions behind the demos problem: the question about the boundaries of an undisputed demos and the question about the sovereignty of the central demos. I will argue that we do lack a categorical or knocking-down argument to settle disputes in this second type of problems. In Section 4, however, I will outline two different strategies, one ideal and one non-ideal, to deal with the central demos problem and its implications, which may ground a theory of the democratic legitimacy of secession. In Section 5, I will summarize the main points of the article.

2. Justice and Legitimacy in Normative Political Philosophy

Most contemporary political philosophers (from Rawls and Habermas, to Dworkin, Pettit, or Christiano) distinguish between justice and legitimacy. There is widespread agreement today that normative political philosophy actually divides into these two realms, even if philosophers usually differ in the concrete way of conceptualizing each of them (for a thorough and straightforward distinction, see Pettit, 2012, Chapter 1).

Both justice and legitimacy are approached here in their normative dimension. Political scientists and sociologists often refer to legitimacy in a different sense, in the Weberian, descriptive sense of legitimation. This descriptive sense of legitimacy is associated to how the people, as a matter of fact, perceive the acceptability of their governments or political institutions. Normative legitimacy, instead, settles the normative standard against which those people's subjective perceptions should be assessed. Legitimacy and justice, and this normative sense, refer to how political institutions should be or ought to be, and not to how they are or how they are perceived.

Even if both are normative, justice and legitimacy refer to different dimensions of political morality and it is crucial to distinguish them well. The best way to understand the contrast between them is to see that they aim to answer two different normative questions (Martí, 2017). The question that justice aims to answer

is the question of *what should be done* on a substantive level by political institutions or political regimes. Thus, a just political regime or institution would be one whose decisions are the correct ones from the point of view of substantive political morality. A correct decision is (the) one the content of which is regarded as acceptable from the point of view of normative political morality, and different theories of justice will provide different answers to the question of what should be done in a particular situation and context. For the case of secession, a theory of justice will answer the question of under what conditions the secession of a particular territory from a larger state will be substantively justified. And different theories of just secession, as the ones I mentioned in the introduction, will provide different answers to that question. A typical structure of a theory of just secession will be the following one: "If conditions *a*, *b*, *c*, obtain, then the secession of territory *x* from the larger state *y* is morally justifiable," where *a*, *b*, and *c* stand for different normative requirements, *x* for the seceding territory previously identified according to some other criterion, and *y* stands for the state from which *x* might be morally permitted to secede.

The question that legitimacy aims to answer is a different one. Legitimacy is concerned with *who and how should make certain political decisions*, and not about which decision or decisions are the correct ones. In that respect, the question that legitimacy aims to answer is eminently procedural. This does not exclude the possibility that such standard may have some substantive requirements. Most philosophers, like Rawls, Habermas, Dworkin, or Pettit, actually include, for instance, the general respect for basic human rights. But the central question of legitimacy has to do with who and how should make decisions, and this is a procedural question. As with justice, legitimacy settles a standard of normative political morality against which political institutions or regimes, or even concrete political decisions, may be assessed. In that sense, a political institution is legitimate if it is the authority that has the right to make certain decisions or the right to rule in a particular context. And a concrete political decision may be legitimate if it has been made by the right body and through the right procedure. This is why legitimacy is intrinsically connected to the concept of authority and through this to the issue of political obligation. The normative discussion about the notions of legitimacy, authority, and political obligation is huge, and different theories have been proposed to make sense of them (Christiano, 2013; Dagger & Lefkowitz, 2014). Giving a proper account of them would exceed the limits of this article, and it is not actually relevant to the central point that I want to focus on in the next section.

It is easy to see why legitimacy matters. First of all, we happen to disagree greatly about what justice requires, and we need a more operative and less controversial concept of moral acceptability that might be agreed upon by people with different perspectives on justice. And, second, even if we happened to agree entirely on justice issues, we still would need someone or some body to make the political decisions that apply to us, and who and how they make them is not, for different reasons that I will not develop here, morally irrelevant. As a matter of fact, as I will show in the next section, there is wider agreement on issues of legitimacy. And still, we disagree on legitimacy as well. Different theories of legitimacy will provide different answers to the question of who and how should make the political decisions that bind us all. For the context of secession, a theory of legitimate secession will answer the question of who and how should decide about the secession of a particular territory from a larger state in order for this decision to result acceptable from the point of view of political morality. A typical structure of a theory of legitimate secession will be the following: "the secession of territory *x* from the larger state *y* is legitimate if and only if the decision of seceding has been made by *D* through procedure *P* and additional conditions *a*, *b*, *c*, obtain," where *x* stands for the seceding territory, *y* stands for the state from which *x* might secede, *D* stands for the people or body who must make the decision, *P* stands for the proper procedure through which such decision must be made, and *a*, *b*, and *c*, stand for the different additional requirements that might be imposed by political morality.

As I said above, justice and legitimacy aim to answer different questions, but this does not mean that their answers are totally disconnected from each other. What is crucial in distinguishing them is to understand that a particular political institution or a particular political decision might be just and illegitimate, or legitimate and unjust, at the same time. They might also be, of course, both unjust and illegitimate, or finally just and legitimate, which would be the optimal case. When we address the normative acceptability or justifiability of a particular secession from the point of view of political morality, we should be concerned about the justice of that secession, as well as about its legitimacy. And it follows from that that a secession that is just but illegitimate, or one that is legitimate but unjust, are cases of secession that are at least partially inacceptable from the point of view of normative political morality. Having said that, it is on the question of legitimate secession that I focus in this article, leaving aside the question about justice.

3. The Democratic Legitimacy of Secession and the Demos Problem

3.1. The Claim of Democratic Legitimacy in the Case of Secession

Most contemporary theories of political legitimacy adopt a democratic view when answering the question of who and how should make political decisions (Christiano, 2013; Pettit, 2012). This is not equivalent to say that *all* decisions must be democratic in the sense that they must all be made by the people themselves or by their elected

representatives. In any democracy there is room for certain types of public decisions that are to be taken by non-elected officials, including some that are independent from the representative bodies, such as the judicial ones or the decisions made by central banks. These are, however, justified exceptions to a general framework of democratic legitimacy that is widely accepted when applied to political regimes as a whole. There is of course disagreement within democratic theory. Internal central debates such as the debate between intrinsic versus instrumental justifications, the debate about political representation and forms of citizen engagement, or the debate between democracy and technocracy, are meaningful only in the context of this generalized consensus in favor of democratic legitimacy (Christiano, 2013, 2015). Not everyone agrees on the centrality of democracy for political legitimacy either. It is not the purpose of this article to argue for such a democratic conception of legitimacy. The debate on whether and why democracy is the best source of political legitimacy is, again, huge and complex. I will simply take for granted that political legitimacy must be, partially or entirely, based on democratic decision-making, because the central problem I want to discuss in this article, the demos problem, only arises for those who endorse such a democratic conception.

There are as many views of democracy as justifications of it. I do not need to take stance here in favor of any of them, since, from all these views, what I will call the main claim of a democratic theory of legitimate secession can be supported. That claim is the following:

> The secession of a particular territory from a larger state is legitimate insofar as it has been democratically decided or agreed by the people and certain additional conditions obtain.

This claim leaves many questions open, as I will immediately show. But expressed in these broad terms, I take it to be quite a platitude. What could be a legitimate alternative? One might think that a legitimate decision of secession should be taken by a commission of experts (economists, historians, lawyers, sociologists, etc.). But there is no element in the claim of democratic legitimacy that turns to be incompatible with getting experts involved in the decision-making. Not involving them would be clearly irrational. The only thing that would be incompatible with democratic legitimacy is to ask this commission of experts to make such a consequential decision without any previous act of popular delegation of power, or at the very least any form of ex post democratic supervision or control. I do not know of any case in which something like this has been even proposed. And I cannot think of any reason why that should be the case. The same happens with another alternative that would consist of relying on a third party, for instance a third country. Again, getting third parties involved in territorial conflicts as facilitators or mediators is certainly not incompatible with the view of democratic legitimacy, unless what we do is letting such third country or body or person make the decision of secession by itself with neither previous popular delegation of power nor ex post popular control. But how could we justify that? That would be an act of domination by such third party. Since none of this seems plausible to me, I will simply take for granted that some version of the claim of the democratic legitimacy of secession, as it is widely agreed, must be true.

On the other hand, consider the theories of a just secession that I mentioned above. It is obvious that this democratic claim is essential to the so-called plebiscitary theory of secession. This plebiscitary theory might indeed be interpreted as a theory of just secession or plainly as a theory of legitimate secession. If the latter, it could be seen as a specification of the broad claim I formulated above, but then it is not obvious why should it be a theory alternative and incompatible to the theories of just secession. Regarding these other major theories of just secession, such as the remedial, the nationalist, or the mixed views, all I need to say is that they are also fully compatible with the claim of democratic legitimacy. One thing is that, for instance, according to the remedial theory, the recent history of massive human rights violations might be one of the conditions that might justify a decision of secession from the point of view of its justice, and quite a different thing would be to say that secession is morally mandatory or that it is irrelevant who and how makes that decision. The same logic applies to the so-called nationalist theories. You may think that only nations, identified according to certain notion of nationhood, and under the right circumstances, have the right to secede. But, again, this does not mean that they have the obligation to do it. Someone must make the decision—or omit to make it—and legitimacy, as we saw in the previous section, must provide an answer to the question of who and how that person or body should be.

The deliberately broad terms in which I have formulated the claim of democratic legitimacy of secession leaves, as I said above, many questions open. For instance, what does it mean for a decision to be democratically decided? In other words, which exact procedure of decision-making *P* should be followed? Should it be decided necessarily through a referendum, as many theorists of secession often argue? Or could a parliamentary decision or even a presidential decision be enough? Would such decision require in all cases a constitutional reform? Should we necessarily have a negotiation between *x* and *y* about the terms of in which secession will take place in order to make it legitimate? Should courts at some level have some kind of control over the decision? Or what additional conditions should be obtained in order to make the democratic decision fully legitimate? Should we only grant that basic human rights are not violated or should we add other formal or substantive requirements? Central as they are, I will leave all these questions aside in this article, and I will focus on the main question that immediately arises from

this democratic claim: Who is the relevant *people* that must make the legitimate decision of secession? This question might seem unproblematic to many, but it actually leads us to a very serious problem: the so-called demos problem.

3.2. The Demos Problem

Who is exactly the people or demos that should make the decision of secession for it to be legitimate? Should it be the people of the seceding territory *x* or the people of the larger state *y*? And how can we identify *x*, in the first place? This is the so-called demos problem or paradox (Dahl, 1970, 1991), also known as the boundary problem (Arrhenius, 2005), and it has been largely ignored by democratic theory over the centuries until very recently. The problem, simply put, is that democracy takes for granted the existence of a particular, preexisting demos. It is the people who belong to that demos who should govern by themselves according to the idea of democracy. In Lincoln's famous words, democracy would be the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. But what can we do when the sovereignty of the existing demos is at question, as it precisely happens in the case of secession, or when the boundaries of it are far from clear?

From a nationalist point of view, it might seem that the answer is obviously the demos of the seceding territory *x*, D_x, as long as *x* can be identified as a separate nation. This, however, is deeply problematic. Let me use the example of Catalan secessionism to illustrate that point. The historical secessionist movement in Catalonia used to identify the Catalan nation with those territories where the Catalan language was vernacular, the so-called "Catalan countries," which included modern Catalonia, as well as parts of Valencia, Aragon, the Balearic Islands, and Southern France. In the case of an eventual Catalan secession, would *x*, the seceding territory, be all those Catalan Countries? Quite strategically, many secessionists have nowadays given up that idea and they mostly claim that it is modern Catalonia, where the percentage of secessionists is clearly greater, the only territory that should secede from Spain (or from France, for that matter). But why is it so? If the criterion to identify the demos, *D*, is based on a nationalist account, there is no clear boundary between modern Catalonia and certain other Catalan countries. Any boundary we draw seems to be arbitrary. What is more, there is at least one territory within modern Catalonia, the Aran Valley, where people speak a different vernacular language, many of them conceive themselves as a separate nation, and there is a clear majority against the independence of Catalonia from Spain. Should they be part of *x*, the territory that is eventually seceding? How can we determine the exact boundaries of *x*, when nationalism does not provide an accurate concept of nation? Even if we found a non-arbitrary way to determine the boundaries of *x*, why should the people of *x* be the relevant demos, *D*, to make a legitimate decision about the secession of *x*? Why is it not the people of *y*, the larger state, the relevant *D* to the effect of making such a legitimate decision, or even the people of larger political units to which *y* is part, like the European Union (EU)? Again, it is not easy to find a no non-arbitrary criterion to establish *D*, and democracy does not seem to be of any help.

As Joseph Schumpeter early stated (Schumpeter, 1942, Chapter 20), the problem is that for conceptual reasons the relevant demos *D* cannot be democratically settled. A democratic decision establishing certain boundaries of D_1 can only be non-arbitrary, and therefore legitimate, if the demos that makes such decision, D_0, is itself legitimate and non-arbitrary. If D_0 were arbitrary, all decisions made by that demos would be illegitimate. But that, of course, is just the beginning of an infinite regress. At this point, the demos problem converges into the well-known democratic paradox. If legitimacy is equated with democracy, since democracy has at some point been created necessarily by non-democratic means—for there was no democracy before the creation of democracy—an unavoidable implication seems to be the establishment of any democracy is not legitimate in the first place. There is, apparently, no *procedural* way out from this conundrum—although I will attempt one at the end of this section. Therefore, contemporary democratic theory, much under the influence of Robert Dahl, has tried to identify a non-nationalist *substantive* principle that might allow us to identify *D*, or at least D_0, in a procedure-independent way. Let me analyze the two most prominent substantive principles that have been proposed.

The most popular principle of determination of the demos is the *all-affected principle*. In the words of Dahl himself, "everyone who is affected by the decisions of a government should have the right to participate in that government" (Dahl, 1970, p. 64; see also Arrhenius, 2005; Brighouse & Fleurbaey, 2010; Dryzek, 2006; Goodin, 2007; Habermas, 1992; König-Archibugi, 2017). There are two major problems with this principle. First, we have an epistemic problem. Different people might potentially be affected by a decision in different ways, at different levels, and in different moments, and we may have serious, perhaps fatal, difficulties in determining in advance who may end up being affected by a decision in the mid and long term. The solution might be to acknowledge that the affectedness condition may come by degrees and that everyone in the world, including the present as well as the future generations, can be potentially affected by any decision. For some, this works as a reductio objection against this principle. For others, it just shows that we have reasons to favor some form of global democracy (Dryzek, 2006; Goodin, 2007). In any case, if we apply this principle to the case of secession we may end up with an unrealistic conclusion. It is obvious that the secession of territory *x*—let us say, Catalonia—from the larger state *y*—Spain— affects both the people of Catalonia and Spain.

It might seem, then, that the relevant demos to make a legitimate decision should be the Spanish one. But the rest of the member states of the EU would also be clearly affected, since this would imply an alteration of the EU's treaties, institutions, and borders. Should *D*, the demos that has to make the secession decision in Catalonia, be integrated by the population of all EU member states? What about other neighboring countries, such as Andorra, Switzerland, or Morocco, whose interests could also be affected? What about other more distant countries that might be strongly connected to Catalonia or Spain, such as the USA, or many countries in Latin America? Should all participate in the decision about the potential secession of Catalonia? It does not seem very plausible.

The main alternative to the all-affected principle is the *all-subjected principle*, according to which all the people who are legally bound or subjected to a decision should participate in making such decision (Abizadeh, 2008; Beckman, 2014; López-Guerra, 2005). There are two obvious problems with this second view. First, the notion of legal subjection or bindingness is ambiguous. One might think that being legally bound or subject to a particular political decision means having to face the legal consequences of such decision. But who has to face the legal consequences of an eventual secession of Catalonia from Spain? All Spaniards would definitely be subject to that decision and face its consequences. But so would the rest of European citizens, since, again, the EU treaties, institutions and borders would be immediately altered. The same problem applies to cases when foreign visitors have the legal obligation to obey at least certain local legal norms, such as the criminal code. There is no doubt that they are legally subject to the local criminal code. Should they have participated in the decision-making process that enacted it? One strategy to avoid this problem is to understand the notion of legal subjection in stricter terms, and consider subjected only the people that the concrete norm or decision, or the legal system to which it belongs, identifies as legally bound by it. But this brings us to the second problem. The all-subjected principle interpreted this way is obviously circular. The only way to determine the relevant demos, *D*, for a particular political decision would be to anticipate which would be the people legally bound by such decision. This means that only the relevant people may determine who the relevant people are. But how can we know who is the relevant people in the first place? The only way to avoid the circularity here would be to refer to a previous norm in the same legal system. But that solution to the problem of circularity comes at the cost of generating a new infinite regress. Imagine, again, how this principle could be applied to a particular case of secession. The people of the seceding territory *x* might make the decision of seceding from *y* and establish that the relevant people, *D*, is the people of *x*, because they are the ones legally subject to that decision, simply ignoring the other effects that such decision might imply for other people. But since the people of *y* at large are, according to this, unbound by such decision, nothing would prevent them from making an opposite decision reaffirming the territorial unity of *y*, and banning the secession of *x*. Both decisions are made by the people who are legally subject in strict terms to each of them, but they are of course contradictory. Which of them is the legitimate one?

None of these two principles, or any other of their alternatives, can solve the demos problem regarding cases of secession. The reason is that they are not designed to do so. These substantive principles are indeed intended to solve a different kind of problem: namely, to answer the question of who should be allowed to participate in a particular decision when general sovereignty is not at stake. Despite the problems they may have, some of which I have mentioned above, they may be useful for instance to give orientation to the question of who should vote in a particular local referendum or who should be enfranchised in a certain election, when there is no fundamental quarrel about who is the sovereign people at large. Take the debate on enfranchising long-term immigrants or the one on banning the disenfranchisement of prisoners in the US or the UK. What we have in those cases is a demos D_1 taking into consideration whether these two collectives should be enfranchised. In the deliberation they may use substantive arguments based on the all-affected principle or the all-subjected principle or any other alternative principle of inclusion to support such enfranchisement. Thus, D_1 may incorporate through a democratic decision those social groups into the demos, with the result of expanding it into demos D_2. If D_1 has good substantive reasons to do so, that means that D_1 has been not fully legitimate in the past, since it has operated in exclusion of those two social groups the inclusion of which has been considered now democratically required. It is important to notice, however, that legitimacy is not an all-or-nothing property of governments or political institutions. It is rather scalar. Governments, institutions, and political decisions may be more or less legitimate or illegitimate. The fact that we have good democratic reasons to expand D_1 into D_2 by incorporating two social groups does not make the government or the decisions taken by D_1 totally illegitimate. They make the decisions made by D_2 prima facie more legitimate, but not necessarily perfect either.

This offers an interesting solution to Schumpeter's procedural problem of infinite regress. A demos can make from time to time a self-referential decision that changes its boundaries increasing or decreasing its legitimacy, its right to rule in a particular territory. There is hardly ever a foundational demos, D_0, starting from scratch. Even foundational constitutional decisions, such as the signature of the federal US Constitution in 1787, are usually ratified by some people(s)—in the case of the US, by the states that had previously seceded from Great Britain, and in the case of those states individually, by the peoples established in those territories more or

less well demarcated—with some degree of legitimacy. Legitimacy never goes from zero to one in one decision. One may actually see part of the history of democracy as an ongoing project of enfranchising more and more people. And principles such as the all-affected principle and the all-subjected principle have proven very helpful to strengthen that trend. But they offer no solution when it is the sovereignty of the ultimate relevant demos, *D*, what is precisely at stake. They might be rightly regarded as principles that aim to solve *the boundary problem*, rather than *the central demos problem*, when the central idea of sovereignty is disputed. If we stick to the status quo and presuppose that the sovereign relevant demos in a case of secession is the one of the larger state *y*, then all the citizens of that state should participate in the decision about the eventual secession of *x*. But if the citizens of *x* presuppose that they should be sovereign to make a decision about their eventual secession from *y* by themselves, then it would be only them the ones that would conform to the relevant demos *D*. The problem is that in both cases they would be begging the question. What we have is two different *demoi* competing to be the sovereign one. Giving precedence to one of them over the other seems arbitrary.

Secessionists usually claim that it should be the people of the seceding territory *x* the only relevant demos to make a decision of secession, and the argument they offer is the value of self-government or self-determination. The problem with that claim is that the value of self-government presupposes that you have previously identified a sovereign "self," and this is precisely what the decision of secession—for instance, through a referendum of secession—should establish. The sovereign demos D_x does not preexist to a legitimate decision of secession. It is constituted by it. Secessionists usually use the metaphor of a divorce. When two individuals want to put an end to their marriage, most legal systems do not require mutual consent. Just the individual will of one of the spouses is enough. Let us leave aside that not all legal systems do the same, and that the regulation of other situations that fall closer to that of secession, such as two partners in a society that break up and split the society, does not acknowledge such unilateral right. The important point is that in contrast to the example of a divorce, where the autonomy or sovereignty of each of the spouses is not at stake, in the case of a secession this is precisely what needs to be decided. The content of a legitimate decision of secession is no other than the establishment of a new sovereign demos. Presupposing the previous existence of such sovereign demos D_x would be arbitrary, since no legitimate decision has been made yet. All that we have before such decision is the status quo, that is, the existence of the demos of the larger state, D_y, which is presumably partially legitimate. The difficulty, of course, contrary to a case of boundary problem, is that in a case of secession it is precisely the legitimacy of D_y's sovereignty what is being challenged. Again, it would be begging the question, and therefore arbitrary, to simply give priority to the status quo. And the scalar approach supported by substantive principles that has proven useful to overcome Schumpeter's difficulty of procedural infinite regress does not seem of any help here.

I have distinguished two variants of the demos problem. One emerges in those decisions that aim to redraw only the internal boundaries of an existing demos, the sovereignty of which is not fundamentally at stake. Following much of the literature, I propose to call this first variant *the boundary problem* (see, for all, Arrhenius, 2005). And we have several substantive principles that may help us to find a legitimate solution to that problem. The second variant emerges in a totally different type of decisions, where it is the sovereignty of the existing central demos what is precisely being challenged, and the external borders of the territory where such demos is supposed to be sovereign are questioned. I propose to call this second variant *the central demos problem*. Regarding this, we seem to be trapped in a sort of paradox or dilemma, and there is apparently no argument able to categorically determine who is the relevant demos, *D*, in a case of secession, where it is the sovereignty of the existing central demos what is at stake. Does it mean that we should abandon the democratic theory of legitimate secession? Should we give away the idea of redrawing our borders in a democratic way? That would be throwing the baby out with the bath water.

4. Democratic Redrawing of Borders

Even if there is no categorical or knocking-down argument to solve the central demos problem, that does not mean that we should give up the possibility of establishing certain conditions for a democratically legitimate secession. In this section I will propose two ways in which we may do that: I will call them respectively the ideal strategy and the non-ideal one.

Let me start with the ideal strategy. Firstly, we should treat the case of secession as a special case within a wider category, namely, the general case of redrawing state borders, which includes cases of integration, supercession, and secession, among others. This will help us to find a more fruitful and democratic approach, consistent to the one we normally use in the other cases of redrawing borders. Consider the case of integration, which I take to be an easy case for democratic legitimacy. Two states, *a* and *b*, are considering integrating or merging with each other. Who is the legitimate authority to make such a decision of integration? If one adopts a democratic view of legitimacy, as I do here, it is obvious that it should be the people of both existing states. To be more precise, there should be, first, a decision made by D_A and another one made by D_B, following the right procedure *P*, and then the representatives of both states should sign an agreement or treaty of integration. In the case of supercession, a state *c* integrates into a larger state *D*, without constituting a new state. Also in this case, we could

agree in that the democratically legitimate authorities to make that decision are, respectively, the peoples of *c* and *D*, since, we may assume, caeteris paribus, no people should be forced to be part of a different state or accept a new addition in its own state against its will. In all these cases a veto from any of the existing *demoi* would be enough to stop the process of integration or supercession, at least regarding that particular demos. These are easy cases because the sovereignty of *a*, *b*, *c*, and *D* is not disputed, and this makes a difference with the case of secession. Because of the central demos problem, and in contrast to the two easy cases, we may conclude that the would-be demos of the eventually seceded territory, D_x, has no authority to impose (unilaterally) its will for secession to the demos of the larger state, D_y. The reason is that granting D_x the sovereignty required to have such authority would be begging the question, and therefore arbitrary. However, and for the same reason, we shall conclude that the demos of the larger territory, D_y, has no authority to impose (so to speak, unilaterally) its will on the demos of territory *x*, D_x, if it is the case that such demos wants to secede. Let me be clear: D_y, assuming *y* is a democratic state, has authority to make general political decisions, including those relative to the boundary problem. But they lack the sufficient authority to make a unilateral decision in order to prevent *x* to secede, since that sovereignty is precisely what is being challenged, and the existing borders are all arbitrary.

Having said this, let us imagine that there is an agreement between both *demoi*, D_x and D_y, about the secession of *x* from *y*. The people of both territories agree that the people of *x* should be allowed to secede if they want. What could be the problem, then, from the point of view of democratic legitimacy? I cannot imagine an argument to say that something that is voluntarily and democratically agreed by both potentially sovereign *demoi*—assuming that human rights are not and will not be violated and the other normal conditions obtain—is illegitimate. This is, in my view, the ideal scenario; one that offers no doubt from the point of view of democratic legitimacy. One may wonder how unrealistic it is to expect such ideal scenario to occur. But in my opinion this is exactly the scenario that has taken place in Quebec, Scotland, and New Caledonia, among other cases. Remember that I have said nothing about which is the procedure *P* that the peoples involved should follow in order to make their decisions legitimate. There are variations regarding this issue. In the cases of the UK and France, there was a previous authorization either by the Prime Minister or the National Assembly of the referendum in Scotland and New Caledonia. In the case of Canada, and according to the criteria identified by the Canadian Supreme Court, there was the need of an ex post negotiation with the Federal Government in addition to the generic permission by the Canadian constitution. In these three cases there was some kind of agreement by the peoples of D_x and D_y, and it was finally the will of D_x not to secede what prevented secession to happen, precisely on the basis of democratic legitimacy considerations. Thus, I claim that this ideal scenario is not so unrealistic as it might look.

But what can we do if we are not in the ideal scenario, if there is no agreement between D_x and D_y? Taking the demos problem seriously implies that we should maintain that none of them has the legitimate authority to impose unilaterally its will to the other. All what they can do is to keep deliberating and negotiating in good faith in order to try to reach an agreement. But what if one of them, typically the people of the larger existing state D_y, refuses to negotiate and simply blocks the situation forever? That would be democratically illegitimate. Prima facie, it would be as illegitimate as the people of D_x declaring the independence and seceding from *y* against the will of D_y. This is what follows from acknowledging the existence of the central demos problem. We might then develop a totally different non-ideal approach to the conflict that should consist in comparing the two illegitimate alternative scenarios, the two evils, so to speak, to try to measure which of them would be worst from a democratic perspective. Here a number of other variables would be relevant. As a way of an example, even if numbers is not the only variable to take into account, they are definitely relevant. Consider scenario 1 in which the people of D_x wants to secede by a majority of 90% and with a very strong or intense preference, while the people of D_y opposes that secession only by a majority of 52% and with a mild preference. The illegitimacy of D_y blocking an agreement of solution for the conflict and forcing a large majority of people in *x* to be part of a state against their will seems to me, caeteris paribus, greater than the illegitimacy of D_x unilaterally imposing its will. Now compare this first scenario with a second one in which the numbers are just the opposite: 90% of D_y rejecting the secession of *x*, while only a bare majority of 52% of D_x favors secession. Here it seems that imposing a secession would be, from a democratic point of view, much more illegitimate than remaining in the status quo. As I said, the number of variables to consider in this non-ideal approach is high, and developing a thorough analysis of how it might work exceeds by far the possibilities of this article.

5. Conclusions

In this article I have tried to provide a preliminary theory of the democratic legitimacy of secession. This is an attempt to fill the gap in the existing normative literature on secession, which has disproportionately focused on the issue of justice, rather than the legitimacy of secession. I have claimed that the right approach to the problem of the legitimacy of secession is the democratic one, since I am unable to find a plausible alternative to it. However, it must be acknowledged that, as with any democratic view, such approach raises a demos problem. I have examined different solutions that have been proposed to solve such a problem and identified important

limitations in all of them. In any case, I have argued that those solutions may provide some help when we try to solve one variant of the demos problem that I have called *the boundary problem*, but they are totally inadequate if what we face is a second variant that I have named *the central demos problem*, in which the sovereignty of the central demos is at stake. I have claimed that, from a democratic perspective, there is no categorical solution to the central demos problem, and therefore that it is something that we have to live with and extract all the relevant consequences. However, I have identified two different strategies to address the problem and its consequences: an ideal one, based on the goal of reaching democratic consensus or agreement among the peoples involved, and a non-ideal one, the concrete development of which requires much more theoretical work to be done. As it is always the case with democracy, this is just a work in progress.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

José L. Martí is associate professor of legal and political philosophy at Pompeu Fabra University. His research focuses on republicanism, global governance, legitimacy, deliberative and democratic theory, and the impact of new technologies. He has published several books, including *La República Deliberativa* (Marcial Pons, 2006), *Deliberative Democracy and Its Discontents*, co-edited with Samantha Besson (Ashgate, 2006), *Legal Republicanism*, also co-edited with Samantha Besson (Oxford University Press, 2009), and *A Political Philosophy in Public Life*, co-authored with Philip Pettit (Princeton University Press, 2010).

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Article

An Imperfect Firewall: Quebec's Constitutional Right of Secession as a Device Against Domination

Lluís Pérez-Lozano

Department of Political and Social Sciences, Pompeu Fabra University, Spain; E-Mail: lluis.perezlozano@upf.edu

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Abstract
The idea of including a right of secession in democratic constitutions has been discussed by different political and legal theorists; however, little has been said on the matter from the point of view of democratic-republican political philosophy. This article undertakes this effort by means of a normative analysis of Quebec's constitutional right of secession, as outlined in the Quebec Secession Reference. This analysis shows how the non-unilateral nature of this right minimises the risks for republican freedom (as non-domination) and inclusion in the Quebec secession conflict, while the fact that it is limited to a national constitutional framework dampens this achievement.

Keywords
Canada; constitutionalism; democracy; domination; factions; Quebec; republicanism; secession

Issue
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1. Introduction

The possibility of a constitutional right of secession in modern democracies has attracted the attention of different scholars, either to endorse it (Corlett, 1998; Jovanovic, 2007; Norman, 2003; Weinstock, 2000, 2001) or to reject it (Aronovitch, 2006; Sunstein, 1991, 2001), but up until now little analysis on the matter has been done from the point of view of democratic-republican political philosophy. This article undertakes this analysis by trying to answer one question: To what extent can a constitutional right of secession be useful in order to minimise exclusion and domination (understood in democratic-republican terms) stemming from secession political conflict in modern democracies? My answer is built upon a normative analysis of the case of Quebec, which in 1998 was granted a (quasi) constitutional right of secession by the Supreme Court of Canada.

To sum up, I think that secession conflicts must be understood as the ultimate expression of centre-periphery conflict, in which permanent majorities and permanent minorities disagree and fight over how the state should be conceived and organised in terms of economy, territory, and identity. These political conflicts imply a series of threats concerning exclusion and domination, and the case of Quebec shows us that a constitutional right of secession can act as a firewall against them due to its non-unilateral nature, which largely avoids intractable debate on who is the sovereign over the territory inhabited by the permanent minority. However, constitutions do not discuss who the sovereign is, but take it for granted, and this weakens the capability of a constitutional right of secession to minimise exclusion and domination.

I will present this analysis in the following five sections: an outline of the theoretical and methodological framework employed; a description both of the Quebec Secession Reference (here also referred to by Reference) and the constitutional right of secession it outlines; an account of its strengths in terms of minimising domination and exclusion in the Quebec secession conflict; a critique in the opposite direction, highlighting the unresolved issues that undermine its strengths,

and particularly of the Reference's failure to designate an arbiter for a potential non-unilateral secession process; and a summary of my conclusions.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

As with any other tradition of political thought, there is not a single and univocal understanding of republicanism. This article is based on the contemporary reconstruction of the republican tradition developed by authors like Pettit (1997) or Bellamy (2007) upon the historical work of Skinner (1998), arguably the mainstream in current republican literature. According to these scholars, republicanism (a) stands for freedom as non-domination; (b) understands domination as the power of X to exercise arbitrary interference over Y; (c) argues that, in order to promote republican freedom, private sources of power must be controlled and dispersed by the state; (d) argues that, in order to prevent the state of becoming itself a dominator, it must be organised as a constitutional self-governing political community, with its own powers being dispersed, prevented to be monopolised by any faction, and kept in check by civic virtue and the rule of law; and (e) argues that civic virtue and freedom are mutually dependent. Besides, democratic republicans, as opposed to oligarchic ones, seek republican freedom to include as many people as possible. Thus, domination and exclusion, so defined, are the main concerns of democratic republicanism.

Republicanism so considered encompasses authors like Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Madison, or Wollstonecraft, to name but a few. For all these thinkers, one of the key elements, in order to design political institutions, was their ability to manage political conflicts so that none of the contending factions could win an absolute (and, therefore, arbitrary) power over the others. However, republicanism has given little attention to design institutions able to manage a type of political conflict in which the contending factions seek neither to win power *within* a state nor to win power *for* a state, but either to *become* a state out of another one (secessionism) or to prevent someone from doing so (unionism). That is: secession conflicts.

In my view (Pérez-Lozano, 2021, pp. 28–32), these political conflicts may imply four different threats in democratic republican terms: (a) exclusion, as some people who would be directly affected by secession may be excluded from deciding on it (for example, an ethnic minority within the seceding territory); (b) domination by blackmailing minorities, as in case they were entitled to secession, powerful minorities (for example, wealthy ones) could be able to blackmail the rest of the polity; (c) domination by arbitrary permanent majorities, as secession conflicts are usually the ultimate expression of particularly deep centre-periphery political conflicts, in which the centre and a given regional periphery of the state are politically hegemonised, respectively, by a permanent majority and a permanent minority, both of them defined along permanent disagreements on how the state should be conceived and organised in terms of economy, territory, and identity (Rokkan & Urwin, 1983) so that without a feasible exit option, permanent minorities would be at mercy of arbitrary permanent majorities; and (d) instability, that is, the risk that a bad handling of secession conflicts, and even the absence of any handling at all, is likely to promote instability, eventually triggering exclusion and/or domination.

I think that a democratic republican theory of right of secession, able to overcome those threats, must pay particular attention to the possibility of designing non-unilateral mechanisms for secessionists and unionists to pursue their goals. This requires us to outline how a balanced negotiation framework for secession conflicts could look. Unlike most scholars (Buchanan, 2007, pp. 338–339), I don't regard "constitutional" and "non-unilateral'' as necessarily synonymous; however, it is clear that exploring the possibility of a constitutional right of secession is a good place to start this effort. This article undertakes this exploration through a case study: Quebec's (quasi) constitutional right of secession as sketched in the Quebec Secession Reference by the Supreme Court of Canada.

This is not a causal or a descriptive, but a *normative*, case study (Bauböck, 2008, pp. 56–57): My aim has not been to get descriptions or to infer causal explanations, but rather to analyse the compliance between an institutional device (Quebec's constitutional right of secession) and a normative approach (democratic republicanism), in order to draw lessons for the management of a type of political conflict (secession conflicts) in a broader number of cases (modern democracies) from the point of view of that approach. Here arise, however, two methodological questions: Why this focus on modern democracies, instead of also examining the constitutional right of secession in authoritarian contexts? Why give primacy to Quebec over other cases of constitutional right of secession in modern democracies?

In both questions, the answer has to do with a concern for minimising what we may call "normative noise," that is, those normative issues that distract our attention from the ones that we wanted to discuss in the first place. In order to use cases of constitutional right of secession to evaluate its usefulness for democratic-republican purposes, the absence of democracy is one of the most disturbing sources of normative noise. In our days, modern democracies are the closest polities to democratic-republican ideals, however imperfectly. The usefulness of a constitutional right of secession for democratic-republican purposes will therefore be better analysed by focusing on modern democracies than on authoritarian regimes. It is when someone seeks to create a modern democratic state out of the territory of another one that we find the tricky questions for democratic republicanism.

On the same grounds of minimising normative noise, I decided to sidestep those cases of constitutional right of secession in democratic contexts in which, until

very recently, violence has played a prominent role in the secession conflict (Northern Ireland, Serbia, and Montenegro) or size and geography make it quite problematic to extrapolate results to the bulk of modern democracies (St. Kitts and Nevis, Liechtenstein). I also considered it better to discard: Scotland and Bougainville, since what we find there is not a constitutional right of secession as such, but rather an ad hoc agreement between secessionists and the central government that, constitutionally speaking, relies on the good faith of the latter; Norway, Iceland, and Puerto Rico, since in these cases the seceding or potentially seceding territory was not exactly integrated into the host state, but rather formed a quasi-sovereign unit under the umbrella of a larger, associated sovereign state; and Ethiopia, since it is far from being a functioning and stable modern democracy, having become a hegemonic party system following the categorisation of Sartori (2005).

Quebec, in contrast, does not present these problematic features. The only serious struggle for violent secessionism, led by the far-left Front de libération du Québec, only lasted for about seven years, indeed before Quebec secessionism actually became a major political force with real political power. Quebec's size and geography are fairly comparable to other major potentially secessionist territories, such as Scotland, Catalonia, the Basque Country, or Flanders. Its constitutional right of secession is implicitly recognised in a judicial Reference, which actually imposes obligations on the federal government on that score. It is not a colony, nor an associated state, but an integral part of the sovereign state of Canada. Moreover, both Quebec and Canada are stable and well-functioning modern democracies. Upon these considerations, I have built my normative analysis of Quebec's constitutional right of secession, which I develop in the following four sections.

3. Context and Content of the Quebec Secession Reference

The narrow margin of the "No" victory in the 1995 Quebec sovereignty referendum triggered the debate of what would have happened in the event of a "Yes" victory. According to Dion (1995), the positions in this debate could be divided between two broad groups: impossibilists (for whom Quebec's secession would have been impossible, even in the event of a "Yes" victory) and inevitabilitists (for whom Quebec's secession would have been rendered inevitable by a "Yes" victory). As Dion recalls, both inevitabilitists and impossibilists assumed that a "Yes" victory would have opened a period of economic and political uncertainty. However, while impossibilists focused on the effects that such uncertainty would have had over Quebec, inevitabilitists' attention was mainly on the effects that it would have had over the rest of Canada (ROC).

It was due to this uncertainty that the federal government submitted the request of an advisory opinion of the Supreme Court on the following three questions: (a) Under the Constitution of Canada, can the National Assembly (that is, Quebec's parliament), legislature, or government of Quebec effect the secession of Quebec from Canada unilaterally? (b) Does international law give the National Assembly, legislature, or government of Quebec the right to effect the secession of Quebec from Canada unilaterally? In this regard, is there a right to self-determination under international law that would give the National Assembly, legislature, or government of Quebec the right to effect the secession of Quebec from Canada unilaterally? (c) In the event that there were a conflict between domestic and international law on the right of the National Assembly, legislature, or government of Quebec to effect its secession from Canada unilaterally, which would take precedence in Canada?

In a book written shortly before the release of the Quebec Secession Reference, and published shortly after, Young (1999, p. 127) affirmed that there was "no doubt this will be a carefully written and nuanced judgment, but it will very likely state that secession is illegal under domestic law unless accomplished through an amendment of the Canadian constitution." Sovereigntists denied the legitimacy of the Court to rule on the matter, accusing the Court of having a pro-federalist bias and asserting that Quebecers, as a people, had an inalienable right to decide their own future (Sauvageau et al., 2005, pp. 105–107).

To the surprise of many, but as some keen commentators predicted (Sauvageau et al., 2005, p. 113), the Reference eventually appeared not to be the definitive constitutional blow against sovereigntism that Ottawa sought, and the sovereigntists feared. Certainly, the Court denied Quebec the right of unilateral secession either under constitutional or under international law; and since no conflict was seen between those two legal bodies, the Court deemed it unnecessary to answer the third question. The originality of the Reference was due to the fact that, in addition to it denying Quebec's right to secede unilaterally, it also denied Ottawa (and the other provinces) the right to unilaterally ignore a democratic secessionist will, expressed by a clear majority of Quebecers in front of a clear question on secession. A clear "Yes" victory should be followed, according to the Reference, by negotiations in good faith between Quebec and the ROC, in order to reach an agreement; an agreement which could naturally include secession, although the Reference did not clearly specify whether secession was just a possibility or an almost certain outcome of that negotiation (as I will discuss in the fifth section of this article).

The Court derived this conclusion from its reading of the Canadian constitution as based on the (interdependent) principles of federalism, democracy, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and protection of minorities. Thus, the Court expelled the unilateralist positions of both sides from the field of what was constitutionally acceptable while outlining an arena in which the reasonable

aspirations of both parties could be expressed and pursued by peaceful and democratic means and, in the end, negotiated with the other party. According to Requejo (2005, p. 60), this was tantamount to "recognising the legitimacy of the right to self-determination for the peoples of a multinational federation," but regulating it "from a federal rather than from a nationalist perspective.''

As Young (1998, p. 15) said, the Reference "delivered something to each side," and it was indeed "hailed as a victory by both federal government and Quebec government representatives alike" (Woehrling, 2000, p. 93); thus, the Supreme Court gained legitimacy as an impartial actor among initially reluctant Quebec sovereigntists, while maintaining its legitimacy among federalists who would have been disappointed by an excessively generous stance towards secessionists. The Reference can therefore be described as balanced and moderate, having given Quebec a (quasi) constitutional right of secession. Now, the question is to what extent is this constitutional right of secession, as outlined in the Quebec Secession Reference, a useful device to overcome the four threats to democratic-republican goals that we have seen linked to secession conflicts.

4. A Firewall Against Domination and Exclusion

We have no reason to think that the judges of the Supreme Court of Canada had republicanism in mind when they delivered the Quebec Secession Reference. However, the democratic-republican goals of minimising domination and exclusion are largely in tune with the idea of the Canadian constitution being based on an interdependent relationship between the principles of federalism, democracy, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and protection of minorities. As Schertzer (2016, pp. 139–168) states, the Reference outlines an understanding of the Canadian federation as the process and outcome of negotiation between different legitimate models of such federation, instead of imposing one of them; an understanding which, as Schertzer (2016, p. 83) points out, is in line with republican principles concerned with reducing domination. Following this reading of the Reference, we can ask whether the constitutional framework outlined for the Quebec secession conflict is a good firewall against the four threats mentioned in the second section.

The threat which is most obviously confronted by the Reference is the threat of instability. The Quebec Secession Reference provides an answer to what would (or, at least, legally should) happen after a "Yes" victory: a process of negotiation in good faith between two distinct democratic majorities. As we will see in the next section, this solution is not problem-free; however, it is a step beyond the pre-Reference situation. On the other hand, concerning the threat of blackmailing minorities, the Reference plainly addresses it by forbidding Quebec's right to secede unilaterally, which obviously undermines Quebec's capacity to blackmail the ROC by recurring to the threat of secession. If secession were to occur, it would have to be through negotiation conducted in good faith by both parties.

Concerning the threat of exclusion, the Reference implicitly addresses it in different ways. On the one hand, it points out an affirmative vote by "a clear majority of Quebecers" to a "clear question on secession" as the basic element that would create an obligation for Ottawa to negotiate with Quebec. Since the Court does not seem to equate "Quebecers" to "Francophone Quebecers," it seems to avoid any of the would-be residents of the independent country being excluded from the vote. Besides, the Court explicitly includes the aboriginal interests among those that should be considered during negotiations (Supreme Court of Canada, 1998, pp. 269, 288). Again, these provisions are not problem-free, but they are better placed to confront exclusion than the pre-Reference situation.

However, where the Quebec Secession Reference is most innovative is, in my view, when it comes to confronting the *threat of* arbitrary permanent majorities. In case of a "Yes" victory, without the Reference imposing an obligation to negotiate on Ottawa, the actual opening of those negotiations would have depended on the goodwill of Ottawa's federalists. Moreover, even if Ottawa were to open such negotiations, it would have been in Ottawa's hands, legally speaking, to end them whenever it wanted. That is: Ottawa would have had arbitrary power to deal with this conflict in the manner that it considered appropriate.

Take, for instance, the case of the two Quebec referenda: During each campaign, Canadian Prime Ministers Pierre Trudeau and Jean Chrétien, both explicitly opposed to moderate Quebec nationalists' goals (such as giving Quebec special powers), made nevertheless imprecise promises of building "a new Canada," thus assuring that a "No" vote was not a vote for the status quo of the Quebec–Canada relationship. Whether or not those promises were fulfilled in the eyes of most Quebec nationalists is quite another thing (and clearly, it was not the case of Trudeau's 1982 constitutional patriation), but it is reasonable to assume that such promises would never have been made without the threat of Quebec leaving Canada.

Had the Court plainly denied Quebec any right of secession, there is no reason to think that Ottawa would have started to behave as an oppressive, uniformistic, or centralistic government. But it is reasonable to assume that any new constitutional negotiation on the status of Quebec within Canada would have been conducted from the perspective that, in the end, Quebec would have had no option but to take what Ottawa was willing to give, or to leave empty-handed. That is, in the conflict between the permanent minority of Quebec nationalists (a permanent majority in Quebec) and the permanent majority of Pan-Canadian nationalists in the ROC on how to organise economy, territory, and identity in Quebec and

Canada, Pan-Canadian nationalists would have, to a large extent, dominated the Quebec nationalists. And the normal devices of modern democracies that are seen as protecting people from domination (separation of powers, the rule of law, universal suffrage, free elections, multi-party competition, individual rights, even federalism) would have left this unequal relationship largely untouched. This is what the threat of arbitrary permanent majorities looks like.

On the other hand, had the Court plainly asserted that Quebec had the right to secede unilaterally, a relationship involving domination could have emerged in the opposite direction due to the threat of blackmailing minorities. Moreover, had the Court refrained from ruling on the issue, the threat of instability (and, hence, of a "might makes right" scenario) would have been left in place. By forbidding each side of the conflict to pursue its goals without taking into account the interests and views of the other, the Quebec Secession Reference minimised the chances of any side dominating the other one. And, provided that this framework, so interpreted, appears to be fair and reasonable to both sides, it would be difficult for any of them to break from it unilaterally whilst also appearing as a reasonable and fair player in the face of public opinion, either domestic or international—making it costly in terms of political legitimacy, as briefly pointed out in the Reference itself (Supreme Court of Canada, 1998, pp. 272–273).

Thus, it seems that the Reference, and the constitutional right of secession it outlines, acts as a firewall against exclusion, domination, and instability in the Quebec secession conflict and, broadly speaking, in the Quebec–ROC conflict on the definition of Canada in terms of economy, territory, and identity. However, the Reference left an important number of issues open and unresolved due, not to negligence by the Court, but to its explicit intention to refrain from playing a political role in the conflict, preferring only to define the general limits and rules that the political actors should observe within the Canadian constitution. Those unresolved issues are cracks in the anti-domination firewall raised by the Court which this article will outline in the following section.

5. Cracks in the Firewall: The Unresolved Issues of the Quebec Secession Reference

There are at least six great unresolved issues in the Quebec Secession Reference: (a) lack of clarity in concluding whether Quebec has a constitutional right of secession or not; (b) what constitutes a clear question; (c) what constitutes a clear majority; (d) what should be considered as "good faith" by the actors during a negotiation after a "Yes" victory in Quebec; (e) would Quebec retain its current borders in the event of secession; and (f) who would be the arbiter of the whole process. As we will see, the final question is the main crack the Reference reveals when assessed as a firewall against domination.

Concerning the first unresolved issue, we should notice that the Quebec Secession Reference, while typically considered as recognising a (quasi) constitutional right of secession for Quebec (Buchanan, 2007, p. 338; Norman, 2006, pp. 176–177; Weinstock, 2001, pp. 195–196), nevertheless contains some assertions that could blur this point. It says that it would be mistaken to consider that, in case of a "Yes" victory in a Quebec secession referendum, the ROC would have no choice but to negotiate the logistical aspects of secession (Supreme Court of Canada, 1998, p. 266); negotiations should follow, and secession should be considered as an option, but it should not be a necessary outcome. However, other parts of the Reference seem to imply a stronger obligation by the ROC to negotiate secession in the event of a "Yes" victory: "The negotiations that followed such a vote would address the potential act of secession, as well as its possible terms, should in fact secession proceed" (Supreme Court of Canada, 1998, p. 294).

A second unresolved issue is the clarity of the question in a referendum on secession. Though unresolved, it is relatively uncontroversial, at least theoretically: It is easy to see that the questions of the two Quebec referenda were at least complex. They contained 108 and 48 words, respectively, and they did not ask about independence as such, but about an agreement giving "sovereignty" to Quebec while remaining in some sort of economic association or partnership with Canada. While, on the other hand, the question asked in the recent Scottish referendum on independence was quite clear and simple: It contained six words, and it directly asked about Scottish independence. Nevertheless, it is still controversial to determine who should, in practice, be the judge of clarity.

More controversial is, of course, the third unresolved issue: What is a clear majority? This has a quantitative dimension and a qualitative one. Quantitatively, it has to do with the percentage of the "Yes" vote that would be considered as "clearly" forming a majority, either over the electorate or over the voters (that is, taking or not taking into account the turnout). Quebec secessionists tend to favour a lower threshold (normally fifty-plus-one of the voters), while federalists tend to favour a higher threshold. The qualitative issue is even more problematic: should a quantitative majority of all Quebecers (even a qualified majority) be enough to consider the "Yes" as a clear winner? Or, considering the demographic composition of Quebec (with Anglophone and Aboriginal minorities, normally opposed to independence), should we also require a certain percentage of non-Francophone minorities to support secession? And what if such percentages were not reached but the majority of Quebecers who favoured secession (regardless of their ethnic or linguistic affiliation) was actually huge?

A fourth unresolved issue has to do with the nature of negotiations. As we have seen, the Reference implies

that, should one of the actors reject negotiations, it will be breaking its constitutional obligations under a fair and reasonable interpretation of the constitution, thus incurring huge costs in terms of legitimacy, both domestically and internationally. However, there are many ways of rejecting a negotiation while apparently trying to negotiate: one can, typically, put on the table a number of unreasonable demands as "unwaivable" knowing that the other side will never accept them (for example, concerning the share of the national debt that each side should assume). This is the reason why, in case of a clear "Yes" victory, the Reference imposes on both sides the obligation of negotiating "in good faith." However, who is the judge of "good faith"? Who decides which demands are "reasonable" and which are not? And what if negotiations happened to fail? Would any of the actors, in that case, have the right to pursue its agenda unilaterally?

A fifth unresolved issue is linked to the qualitative dimension of the definition of a clear majority: Would Quebec retain its current borders after secession? This is known as the debate on the *partition* of Quebec. The point of view of the partitionists was famously summed up by Pierre Trudeau: "If Canada is divisible, Quebec should be divisible too" (as cited in Shaw & Albert, 1980, p. 16). This means that if a majority of Quebecers favouring secession from Canada is enough to justify secession, then a majority of inhabitants of any part of Quebec can also invoke the same principle in order to secede from Quebec and thus remain within Canada. However, suppose Quebec were divisible because Canada were divisible. In that case, it follows that Quebec would be divisible under the same terms as Canada: For instance, in the Aboriginal-populated lands of Northern Quebec, there should be a clear majority of Northern Quebecers (whether Aboriginal or not) answering "Yes" to a clear question on secession of Northern Quebec from the rest of the province; and after that "Yes" victory, then negotiations should follow between Quebec and Northern Quebec (and the ROC?). And, interestingly, we would find that if Quebec were divisible under the same terms as Canada, then Northern Quebec would be divisible under the same terms as Canada and Quebec.

Here, a prudent point of view could regard all this as the demonstration of one of the evils that a too permissive approach to secession is expected to promote: secession ad infinitum. Or, as it is sometimes known, Balkanisation. However, we have reasons to consider this an unlikely risk: People tend to be risk-averse, and there is evidence showing that only a limited range of groups with some sort of "ethnic" or "national" identity show a relevant share of its members as supporting secession (Sorens, 2012, pp. 52–56). Indeed, there is also some evidence that the existence of a legal path towards secession tends to favour the peaceful and stable development of secession conflicts (Sorens, 2012, pp. 112–138) and the promotion and protection of self-government agreements (Sorens, 2012, pp. 139–152). In fact, this is one of the core expectations of the republican tradition concerning factional conflicts: Whenever they are channelled through institutional devices that force all sides to consider the rival factions' interests and views, then peace and stability follow.

One possible answer to these five unresolved issues is considering them as actually unsolvable, at least in theoretical terms. What is a clear majority and even a clear question can vary in time; the borders of an independent Quebec would be one of the issues at stake in a post-"Yes'' victory negotiation, and so on. In fact, this seems to be the approach of the Supreme Court of Canada: There is no option but to leave the resolution of all these issues to the political actors. However, if we are going to deal with these issues on a contextual basis, then it is imperative to know who would be the arbiter that would eventually monitor the resolution of them. Here, the Quebec Secession Reference remains as silent as on the other five issues. And here we have the sixth and final unresolved issue.

Unsurprisingly, soon after the Reference was issued, it became a new matter of controversy between Ottawa and Quebec. Thus, in 2000, the Parliament of Canada passed the so-called Clarity Act, which put into the House of Commons the power to assess the clarity of the question in a referendum on secession before the vote, as well as the power to assess the clarity of the "Yes" majority (had the "Yes" won) after the vote. The Clarity Act also required the inclusion of Aboriginals in the negotiations, which were potentially leading to secession, and stated that Quebec's secession would require an amendment of the Canadian constitution. In Quebec, both federalists and sovereigntists denounced the Clarity Act (Gagnon & Hérivault, 2008, p. 178). Thus, two days later, the National Assembly of Quebec passed the so-called Bill 99, which gave the people of Quebec (presumably, through its representatives in the National Assembly) the sole power to unilaterally define how to exercise their right to decide their political status, as well as setting the threshold for a clear "Yes" victory at 50 percent of the votes plus one.

So the Canadian Parliament defined itself as the arbiter of any new Quebec referendum on independence, both in its process and its results, while the National Assembly of Quebec claimed this role for itself. So, in the end, it seems that the Reference just returned the problem to its starting point: to the impossible task of locating the "subject of sovereignty." The greatness of the Reference was, precisely, that it refused to choose a winner on a who-is-the-sovereign controversy, and thus it avoided running into the normative cul de sac in which all claims of sovereignty fall when we try to use them in order to manage secession controversies; it preferred, instead, to force both sides to democratically compete and, eventually, negotiate.

Unfortunately, by prescribing a sequence of competition and negotiation while avoiding a clear definition of its arbiter, the Court left those five previous issues

not only unresolved but also *unresolvable*; at least, if we want their resolution not to rely on a "might makes right" logic, whose removal made the Reference interesting (in democratic republican terms) in the first place. In my view, this round-trip journey is caused by the fact that the Reference, while designing a useful anti-domination firewall based on a recognition of a "soft" right of secession for Quebec, is nevertheless limited to the framework of the Canadian constitution: National constitutionalism does not discuss who is the sovereign, but takes it for granted; therefore, when it is applied to secession conflicts, it easily leads to who-is-the-sovereign controversies. Thus, the Reference leaves us, in the end, face to face with precisely the controversy that the Court wisely decided to not resolve in favour of any of the parties involved. So it seems that, in terms of preventing domination, exclusion, and instability in any secession conflict, the Reference designs the right device, though placing it in a problematic locus.

6. Conclusion

The opening question of this article was: To what extent can a constitutional right of secession be useful in order to minimise exclusion and domination (understood in democratic republican terms) stemming from secession conflicts in modern democracies? Through an examination of the Quebec Secession Reference, I have come to the conclusion that (a) the constitutional right of secession outlined in the Reference is a useful device in democratic republican terms, due to its non-unilateralist spirit, and that (b) it nevertheless left open a series of unresolved issues in need of an arbiter, with Quebec and Ottawa fighting to assume this role. Thus, we find that a constitutional right of secession, at least in the case of Quebec, seems to be a firewall against domination, albeit an imperfect one. However, this is not a reason to reject it: in the absence of a better alternative, this imperfect firewall is, indeed, much better than no firewall at all. Therefore, a republican theory of secession should take its example into account.

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About the Author

Lluís Pérez-Lozano is an adjunct professor at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, as well as a member of its Political Theory Research Group. His research interests are theories of democracy and justice, with a special focus on republicanism—its theoretical traits, its origins and evolution, its variants, and its possibilities and weaknesses in dealing with normative issues in modern democracies.

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