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Origins of Secession

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Origins of Secession

Abstract

Using a variety of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, I show in this work that secessionist movements across four case studies have three primary characteristics: concerns over status, material welfare, and the viability of the potentially new and independent state.

Keywords

secession, spain, uk, eu, canada, norway, autonomy, Social Sciences, Political Science, Brendan O'Leary, O'Leary, Brendan

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Origins of Secession

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A Review of the Literature

I. Foreword

Extant literature on the field of secession is comparatively sparse, relative to other fields of political science. The majority of literature on secession occupies one of two general categories. The first focuses on a singular case study (e.g., only Tamils in only Sri Lanka, or only Catalans in only Spain),¹ either lending no material toward a broader explanatory modeling or else producing a rudimentary explanatory model tailored only to the case in question. That is, it explains why the author believes the secessionist movement has organized in that state but includes events and groups that exist only within that state and thus are so specific as to lack parsimony. The second category produces an explanatory model, but typically attempts to demonstrate why a movement is *successful* rather than why it *originates*.²

Other writings occupy even smaller niches, such as Buchanan's *Toward a Theory of Secession*, in which, rather than proposing a theory of secession, he merely laments the lack of a theory of secession and later propounds on when a group ought to secede.³ Still others, as with Ryan Griffiths' celebrated book *Age of Secession*, beautifully collate instances of secession from all over the world, but look only at the response of the central state to the seceding entity. While this strategy is useful in explaining why some movements are successful based on how the center reacts to their presence, it too ignores the origins of the movements. Finally, there exists a class of scholars, typified by Nicholas Sambanis,⁴ who study secession and autonomy but who explain only differences in the resultant arrangements in newly independent states, rather than exploring what drives the impulse to *make* a newly independent state.

II. Decentralization

Not only is the field split on the origins of secession, but also on whether certain variables, decentralization for example, promote or discourage secession. Ornstein and Coursen posit that decentralization has an ameliorative effect on secessionist movements because, in theory, it gives the movements at least most of what they want: political autonomy and control over cultural and societal aspects.⁵ Kymlicka on the other hand suggests that decentralization actually emboldens secessionist movements, thus increasing their desire for complete independence.⁶ Brancati strikes a middle ground, relating a series of variables to whether

¹ See, e.g., Luke Learie, *Identity and Secession in the Caribbean: Tobago vs. Trinidad, 1889-1980*, University of the West Indies Press, 2007; Welhengama and Pillay, *The Rise of Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka*.

² See, e.g., Bridget Coggins, "Friends in High Places: International Politics and the Emergence of States from Secessionism" in *International Organization*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Summer 2011), pp. 433-467.

³ Allen Buchanan, "Toward a Theory of Secession" in *Ethics*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (January 1991), pp. 322-42.

⁴ See also, "What's In A Line? Is Partition the Solution to Civil War?" (with Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl) in *International Security* 34 (2) (Fall 2009), pp. 82-118, "Explaining Regional Autonomy Differences in Decentralized Countries" (with Branko Milanovic) in *Comparative Political Studies* 47: 1830-1855 (2014).

⁵ Norman Ornstein and Kimberly Coursen, "As the World Turns Democratic: Federalism Finds Favor" in *American Enterprise*, 1992.

⁶ Will Kymlicka, "Is Federalism a Viable Alternative to Secessionism?" from *Theories of Secessionism*, ed. Percy Lehning, NY: Routledge Press, 1998.

decentralization tamps down secessionism or exacerbates it.⁷ Clearly there is spirited debate in the scholarly community on this topic, and on many others, within the field of secession.

III. Economic Analysis

Another class of literature purports to explain secessionist ideation from a purely economic standpoint. In Robert Young's "The Political Economy of Secession: The Case of Quebec", for example, Young traces economic rationales in explaining why well-developed, liberal economies infrequently experience secession.⁸ Curiously, in the same article he also happens upon the rationale for why a purely economic explanation does *not* work, or at least is not a comprehensive explanation.⁹ Indeed, in exploring the differences between the 1980 and 1995 independence referenda in Quebec, Young in another work lays the framework for concluding that status concerns are more salient even in well-developed, liberal economies than are material concerns. * Other explanations connecting autonomist and secessionist movements to economic rationales include Sambanis and Milanovic's "Explaining Regional Autonomy Differences in Decentralized Countries", Hechter's *Internal colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* and Ragin's "Ethnic political mobilization: The Welsh Case".

IV. Beginnings of Comprehensive Explanation

One work which does attempt to explain secessionist rationales is Sorens' *Secessionism*.¹⁰ Though relatively comprehensive in number of cases considered, there is not a concise formalization, but rather a haphazard jumbling of variables which even intuitively seem not to have a direct bearing on secessionism.¹¹ Similarly, in Wood's "Secession: A Comparative Analytical Framework", he too recognizes an "economic precondition" to secession but admits that this economic facet appears not to obtain in some cases.¹² Rather than examining the other commonalities between instances of secessionism, he attributes this apparent discrepancy to a J-curve, wherein this discrepancy can be explained away in instances in which economic disparity is either not disparate enough or too disparate.¹³ Nevertheless, to his credit, Wood also recognizes other preconditions, namely political and cultural, which supplement his account.¹⁴ Curiously, though, he never formalizes these preconditions into a working theory, instead merely noting apparent commonalities.

One rather clever attempt at explaining secession is Bartkus's 1999 *The Dynamics of Secession* which attributes secession to four criteria: "a distinct community, territory, leaders, and discontent."¹⁵ Nevertheless, there are two conceptual problems with such a definition.

⁷ Dawn Brancati, "Decentralization: Fueling the Fire or Dampening the Flames of Ethnic Conflict and Secessionism?" in *International Organization* 60, 2006.

⁸ Robert Young, "The Political Economy of Secession: The Case of Quebec" in *Constitutional Political Economy* 5(2):1994.

⁹ Ibid, p. 289.

* I will elaborate more on this fascinating prospect later in this piece. The basis for my claim is taken from Robert Young's *The Struggle for Quebec: From Referendum to Referendum?*, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999.

¹⁰ Jason Sorens, *Secessionism: Identity, Interest, and Strategy*, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012.

¹¹ E.g. "access to the sea" as one variable. (Ibid, p. 61).

¹² John Wood, "Secession: A Comparative Analytical Framework" in *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 14(1): 1981, p. 116.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, generally.

¹⁵ Viva Bartkus, *The Dynamics of Secession*, UK: University Press, Cambridge, 1999.

Primarily, it does not explain why secessionism first forms in the minds of the members of that “distinct community”. That is, secessionism intuitively *can* exist in an inchoate form without organized leadership, and Bartkus’s criteria do not account for it. What Bartkus has described is a necessary component of *successful* secessionist movements. This dilutes the original motivations of the broad-based sentiment by examining motivations and behaviors of the political elite. Second, lumping all motivating factors into “discontent” is too ambiguous to be useful in formal modeling. Griffith too, in his *Age of Secession*, recognizes economic, territorial, and community components to secession, but notes no such discontent component which would catalyse secessionism.¹⁶

V. Analysis of Success in Movements

Other notable works include Coggins’ “The History of Secession” which, though a brilliant improvement upon earlier attempts to collate secessionist movements, offers explanation only for the success or lack thereof of a particular movement.¹⁷ Still other works combine multiple pieces by different authors into one book which typically offers fascinating insights into a number of cases, but, due to the specificity employed and the distinctiveness the authors wish to maintain, these pieces necessarily cannot connect each case into an overarching explanatory model.¹⁸

VI. Normative Theory

A final category of literature expresses purely normative views on when, if ever, secession is justified. Kai Nielsen’s “Secession: The Case of Quebec” is a prime example of this type of normative literature.¹⁹ In using Quebec as a case typical of all secessions, Nielsen considers the morality of minority self-identity and the import of preserving their cultures. One classic example of normative writings is Harry Beran’s “A Liberal Theory of Secession”, in which he delivers a striking admonition to scholars to consider the topic of secession more closely.²⁰ Another, more subtle normative work on this theme is Bagwell’s “Yugoslavian Constitutional Questions” which diverges from the normal moral and ethical dilemmas involved in secession and instead opts for a legalistic approach.²¹ While these writings have intrinsic value from a legal and moral perspective, they obviously do not add substance to the discussion of the emergence of the movements themselves.

VII. Whither Secession Theory?

The lack of comprehensive, explanatory writing focusing on the origins of secessionist movements has left a noticeable hole in the literature. Although secession, even today, is one of the phenomena with the most concrete impacts in political science, we are without a satisfying

¹⁶ Ryan Griffiths, *Age of Secession: The International and Domestic Determinants of State Birth*, UK: University Press, Cambridge, 2016.

¹⁷ Bridget Coggins, *The History of Secession: An Overview* from The Ashgate Research Companion to Secession Routledge, 2011.

¹⁸ See generally *Secessionist Movements in Comparative Politics, The Rise of Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka, Secessionism and the European Union*.

¹⁹ Kai Nielsen, “Secession: The Case of Quebec” in *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 10(1): 1993.

²⁰ Harry Beran, “A Liberal Theory of Secession” in *Political Studies* 32, 1984.

²¹ Ben Bagwell, “Yugoslavian Constitutional Questions: Self-Determination and Secession of Member Republics” in *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 21(3), 1991.

model explaining its origins and the rationales of the individuals who precipitate it. My work will seek to answer these questions by employing case studies with data which I have collected personally and which I have recovered from historical documents. I will then connect these case studies through an overarching framework, attempting in the process to explain all movements as a function of the sentiment at the popular level which arises based on three variables. The virtue of this model is that it is parsimonious and may be applied to any case of secession or be used to explain any instance of secessionism.

One common misconception in a great deal of literature²² is that a theory of secession needs to include rationales for why some movements are successful while others are not. These works usually concentrate on the role of international actors in recognizing and sustaining secessionist movements. The problem at the nucleus of this assumption is that there are at least as many (and probably more) variables at play as there are cases of secessionism. For example, the degree to which the state utilizes repressive force, the geographic concentration of the movement(s), and, in our times, the availability of social media saturation for these movements.

Happily, a theory of secession does not necessitate *a priori* a predictive model which examines the probability of secession given these variables. It need only assert that all secession movements possess the same qualities in their initial state. If these qualities are found in each such initial state and their presence can be shown to be in some way causal, it is identical to saying that all secessionist sentiment originates from those qualities. This would be true whether the movements are demonstrably successful, in process, or are failures (in the case of central state repression, e.g.). As a result, in understanding secession as a phenomenon, these origins are more important to trace than state response or international bolstering. I suggest that these origins are indeed ubiquitous in secession and that they are definitionally causal.

What is Secession?

That definitions of secession number nearly as many as the scholars who discuss them provides evidence of the difficulty in defining the concept with exactitude. The following definition governs this text. A.) In any secession there must be a discrete, separable territory occupied by a people who are in some way distinctive from the remainder of the whole, or a distinct part of a whole when a union includes multiple parts, and B.) in a secession one constituent part, the seceding entity, of a larger amalgamation withdraws from the whole leaving behind the rump entity, leaving two independent entities which are significantly less integrated than before. This definition does not include forced separation initiated by the central state ('downsizing'), especially without the constituent part's consent, as occurs, for example, in some decolonizations. It also excludes all forms of territorial autonomy, whether federal or devolved. 'Internal secessions', however, will operate under the same principles as any other secession.

This paper seeks first to identify the common factors among all secessions. Next, it proposes a structure for determining what might catalyze mere secessionist tendencies into a full-fledged movement – that is, what separates a secession from separatist sentiments or inchoate forms of the ethos of independence that eventually fizzle out or are otherwise unsuccessful to date – using several historical examples. Finally, I will conduct regression analysis of polling data collected

²² See, e.g., David Siroky, "Explaining Secession" from *The Ashgate Research Companion to Secession*, Routledge 2011 or John Wood, "Secession: A Comparative Analytical Framework" in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 1981.

from states with secessionist movements. Through this analysis a model of secession will be advanced which might have predictive capacities. Throughout, I will illustrate my arguments by recounting my own experience in Europe researching UKexit²³ and Catalonia.

What Causes Secession?

All over the world, irrespective of governmental system, the natural wealth of a territory, or the language(s) spoken in particular places, proposed and actual secession is relatively familiar. There are, however, few satisfying works to describe its causes, perhaps because of its ubiquity. With such range in geography, political economy, and cultural norms, how can this phenomenon be attributed to anything other than a general dissatisfaction with the ruling regime and the union it cements?

This piece posits that any secession *begins* as the function of three phenomena at the mass level: status concerns, the perceived viability of the potential secessionist polity, and material concerns. A secession movement, whether peaceful and referendum-based, as with the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, or violent and subject to shifting events, as in South Sudan's drive for independence, begins with the same incipient characteristics. Because this theory presupposes a referendum for independence, the voters' ballots are what matter. To that end, it is critical to make the distinction that what matters is not the actual circumstances of status concerns or the economic situation, but rather how the voters *perceive* these situations. This distinction seems facially difficult to reconcile with the objective characteristics of any situation. However, as will be shown in the Regression Analysis Section, delineating fact from opinion makes it easier to develop practical applications such as predictive modeling, because it needs account only for the opinions of the voters, which can be achieved by polling. This is considerably easier than charting regional versus union economic performance or analyzing registries of laws to find those which generate regional security concerns or court decisions minimizing or banning regionally significant cultural practices. While each variable will be covered more comprehensively in their own sections later in this paper, they are defined briefly in the following paragraphs.

Status concerns exist where the people of a region perceive their territory, themselves, or their culture (whether racial, ethnic, or religious) to be threatened by being within a union. The center of the union may threaten the region by force or with policies and/or processes whether they are legal, extra-legal, or illegal. Critically, however, the threat producing a status concern must originate externally to the potentially secessionist region. For example, the central state supreme court may in a hypothetical country rule that a religion – which is the majority religion inside a region, but the minority religion in the state overall – does not warrant special consideration in the workplace, thereby generating a status concern. By contrast, a regional court ruling – critically, comprised of citizens from the region itself and not appointed externally by the center – holding the same would not generate a status concern even if unpopular, because the decision would have come from within the region.

²³ I refer here to the projected withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, accepting the argument that UKEXIT rather than BREXIT is the correct abbreviation (O'Leary, 2016).

Material concerns are those which manifest in a population through thinking that their region will be economically, financially, or productively worse off by staying in its union. The crucial point in defining material concerns is that it is not a calculation of whether it is materially *better* to be independent or to stay within the union. It is instead a metric of whether the population feel they are being economically taken advantage of by remaining inside the union.

In contrast to status and material concerns, which focus on perceived negative actions from the center or circumstances arising from being part of a union, viability concerns are those doubts that citizens in a potentially secessionist region have regarding the viability of the region as an independent state outside the union. Viability concerns may be geopolitical (“I feel my region would not survive independently because we would be attacked and overrun”), internally political (“I feel my region would not survive independently because we are so evenly split between hardliner unionists and hardliner separatists”), or economic (“I feel my region would not survive independently because we would not be economically self-sufficient”).

While every successful secession begins with these commonalities, not every movement exhibiting them will be successful. The campaign’s success is conditional on a number of factors, both exogenous and endogenous, including the response of the central state (whether conciliatory or repressive) and the organization of the secessionist movement. The exact criteria for successful secessions are covered in detail in many other great works and are not the topic of this paper.

Status Concerns, in the context of secession

A prerequisite of secession is a separable territory occupied by a people who are in some way distinctive from the remainder of the whole, or a distinct part of a whole as when a union includes multiple parts. A status concern exists where that territory or its people in some way are threatened or perceive themselves to be threatened by force, policies, or processes external to that territory. In this situation, a portion of a state entity or union perceives that they are being treated as inferior to another segment of the population. This frequently manifests itself as a feeling of being second-class citizens.

Status concerns cover a wide range of de facto and de jure configurations. At times, status concerns are the result of general circumstances. For example, colonialism necessarily subordinates the native population of the colonized territory to the colonizing population. At other times, the concerns arise as a result of distinct government actions which reduce status, such as the Indian presidential decree of 5 August 2019 which revoked Kashmir’s special status, reducing its autonomy and eliminating section 370’s protective wording in the Indian constitution, sparking protests. Between 5 August and 15 September, there were more than 700 protests at this decree, and political leaders in Kashmir called for unification with Pakistan.²⁴

Critically, these status concerns are not easily separated into categories. They may include instances of no or inadequate regional or self-government, diluted representation in the central government, colonialism, cultural or ethnic slights or aggressions (such as refusal to recognize a language or denial of religious rites). Nevertheless, as this paper will later

²⁴ Al Jazeera, “India revokes Kashmir’s special status”, 4 September 2019. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/india-revokes-kashmir-special-status-190904143838166.html>

demonstrate, although the form status concerns take are impossible to predict in advance, they are simple to locate and to measure in intensity.

It will be repeated throughout this paper but bears advance emphasis here that the strength of this form of modeling is its versatility. Although in-depth analysis of specific cases undoubtedly is fruitful to crafting responses and to understanding the situation, the broadness of definition of status concern here contributes to the robustness of the model. A population sufficiently aggrieved to mobilize into independentist movements may have multiple grievances with the central state. As a result, this theory dictates that generalized polling, for example on overall feeling about the central government, is more useful in capturing public sentiment than asking specific questions on, for example, land expropriation or language laws. Issue-specific polling will not work as effectively in most cases because not all of the population will have the same grievance. By asking generally about status concerns, all of the population will be able to report a grievance by virtue of the inclusive nature of the questioning.

As a result, polling status concerns is surprisingly easy, because when status concerns are of sufficient magnitude to warrant secessionism they will appear as responses indicating favorability toward sovereignty. This might at first seem logically distant, however, it is merely the predictable result of any grievance against the state which has not been rectified. The aggrieved population will undoubtedly believe that their independent government would do a better job in addressing whatever issue(s) has constituted their status concern. Take, for example, the instance of UKexit. Extensive research and polling,²⁵ has indicated that concerns about EU-controlled migration, the unelected Commission, and EU-made laws generally were the primary source of mobilization for those who voted to leave the EU. As a result, 78% of the 12,369 individuals polled who voted to leave said they thought that the UK's ability to control their own laws would be improved if they were to leave the EU.²⁶

Material Concerns, in the context of secession

Material concerns, simply, are the belief by the people of a region that being or remaining part of a union will be economically, financially, or productively bad for that region. Critically, it is not a calculation of whether the region is *better* inside or outside of the union, but rather a question of whether the region perceives itself to be taken advantage of by remaining inside of the union. That is, even if a seceding part will be predictably qualitatively and/or quantitatively worse off outside of a union, material concerns may manifest if that part perceives itself to be unfairly taxed, for example.

Material concerns may take the form of disparate or targeted financial regulations or taxes, as for example, was the case for Singapore in the Federation of Malaysia or what autonomists/secessionists say is the case today in Catalonia in Spain. They may also take the form of trade policy dilution as happened in Norway in its 19th century union with Sweden.

Similarly to status concerns, a broad range of issues may constitute a material concern. Nevertheless, there is a common theme among them. Merely a poor economy overall will not

²⁵ See, e.g. any of the numerous polls from Lord Ashcroft Polling and *Brexit and British Politics* by Geoff Evans and Anand Menon, 2017.

²⁶ Ashcroft Polling, Exit Polls, 23 June 2016.

trigger material concerns. That is, if a downturn in the global or regional economy occurs, the potential secessionist entity will not immediately desire secession. As will be discussed in its own section, this occurred in Catalonia in Spain. Although a depressed economy contributed to household income loss in Catalonia, it was not perceived to be the fault of the Spanish central state, and so did not stoke secessionist sentiment in itself. Indeed, material concerns must in some way originate from the central government and either impinge on the secessionist part or advantage the rest of the state without doing so for the secessionist part.

Viability Concerns, in the context of secession

Viability concerns are separate and distinct from both status and material concerns. While the latter two concerns focus on some imposition, perceived or actual, of the central state onto the potential seceding entity, viability in this context is predicated on whether a newly independent state could survive without its rump state. These viability concerns may be economic or geopolitical in nature.

Thus, it is possible to have material concerns but consider oneself to be economically unviable as a separate entity. For instance, a voter in a city might greatly dislike an extra tax imposed on her from the central state but would also consider her city to be economically unviable as a state. In this instance, it is possible to have both a material concern but internally reject it as a rationale for secession due to a perception of unviability as an independent state. It is also possible to have status concerns but consider oneself to be politically unviable as a separate entity. For example, during an interview I conducted with a Deputy of the Spanish Congress,²⁷ she raised the valid point that an independent Catalonia would be politically unviable due to the large proportion of residents there who desire to remain a part of Spain. In this instance, it is possible to have a status concern but subordinate it to doubts about geopolitical viability. In this case it may happen that sovereigntists shift their frame of expectations to compromise and adopt less extreme demands, such as increased autonomy inside of the central state.

For the purposes of this work, what matters is the *perception* of the potential seceding state's viability. Rather than debating the validity and comprehensiveness for a metric of real levels of geopolitical or economic viability, it matters only how the population perceives those levels, which can be shown, e.g., through a poll asking citizens inside of the potential seceding entity how their territory might fare as an independent state, or, even more on the nose, the binary question of whether the seceding entity would be viable.

Overview of the variables

The preceding parts of this paper have elaborated three primary and common variables found in secessionist sentiment. While the following sections will apply all three variables to

²⁷ 8 Jul 2019.

real-world case studies and conduct statistical analysis of them, this section will tie together the variables into a more cohesive formulation.

One of the most interesting implications of this framework is that because of the interrelationship of all three variables, voters may internally reject or subordinate some considerable concerns because of the absence of another. For example, as already mentioned briefly in the preceding section, perceived unviability as an independent state may be enough to weaken outright preferences for secessionism due to status or material concerns.

It may also be possible that good economic circumstances inside of a union effectively smother status concerns, especially if overall economic prosperity is perceived as being delivered by the union. For example, if entering into a new trading bloc (the EU, for instance), was perceived to increase investment, immigration, and travel, thereby spurring growth in the central state but also in the potentially-secessionist region, this mutually, economically beneficial relationship might assuage secessionist sentiment within the region.²⁸ Another example of status subordination to outstanding economic circumstances might come as a decrease in the region's share of the union debt or as an extra remuneration from the center to a secessionist region – in essence, buying the perpetuation of the union. This happened, for instance, in the case of the rebate from the European Union to the United Kingdom secured by Margaret Thatcher.

Thus far these variables have been treated approximately equally, however, another interesting facet of this framework is that they may not weigh equally in the voters' calculi. Indeed, as regression analysis and case study examples will show, status concerns seem to be the overriding feature of secessionism. In the case of Quebec, the inability to produce a status concern with federal Canada in addition to taxation as a material concern quite probably was responsible for the defeat of both the 1980 and 1995 referenda (see Table 2 for example). And, in the case of UKexit, the vast majority of Leavers listed status-related aspects as the main rationale for their vote rather than economic arguments. Conversely, Remainers tended to rely on economic arguments to show the benefit of remaining and the detriment of leaving (see Table 1).

²⁸ One might make the case that Scotland has remained in the UK in large part because it ensured access to the EU's single market and customs union. This is evident in the language used by many of the politicians in Scotland who are not fond of the UK but have tolerated it.

Table 1. Whether voted to Leave/Remain vs single biggest reason for doing so

Decision	% Listing Status* Rationales	% Listing Economic** Rationales
Leave	95%	5%
Remain	0%	74%

Source of data: Lord Ashcroft Polls

* Single biggest reason was “the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK”, “offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders”, or because the UK would have no choice “about how the EU expanded its membership or its powers in the years ahead”. No one listed as their single biggest reason to remain in the EU that they wanted to have decision-making shared with the EU.

** Single biggest reason was “the risks of voting to leave the EU looked too great when it came to things like the economy, jobs and prices” or access to the EU single market.

Finally, it must be repeated that the actual circumstances of status, material, and viability must be divorced from their perceptions by voters. In a sufficiently misinformed or uninformed population, it matters indeed very little whether union actually helps or hurts compared to the counterfactual of life in accomplished independence. As will be shown, economic arguments both for Catalan secessionists and for Leavers from the UK were specious at best. Because independence referenda do not factor in coefficients for GDP per capita or indices of central-state reach, only the votes cast impact the outcome. As a result, the only factors bearing on the referendum result are the voters’ perceptions of the issues. This is both dangerous as it may lead to unfortunate outcomes which have long-lasting and frequently unintended ramifications, but it is also convenient for political scientists because instead of collating economic figures, geopolitical viability measures, and comparing regional versus central state legal systems and legislation, one need only poll a representative sample of voters in the region in which the referendum will be administered in order to gauge the outcome.

One potential weakness of this framework, however, is that these outcomes cannot be predicted far in advance. Because these concerns often change over the course of a referendum campaign, the numbers taken at the outset of the announcement of a referendum will not always square with what voters are thinking in the polling booths. Nevertheless, examining the measures of status, material and viability concerns may perhaps reduce the numbers of “I don’t know” respondents in the traditional “How will you vote?” polls which have tended to be inaccurate in the past. This is because most voters will be able to more readily respond to questions asking them about their feelings than about grave political matters. As a result, polls will garner more accurate results by asking for opinions on the matters of central state intrusion and their own economic situations than by asking for a yes or no on the life-altering prospect of the status of their union.

In the following sections I will make use of four case studies to demonstrate examples, both historical and modern, of status, material, and viability concerns. These studies – Norway-Sweden, the United Kingdom in the European Union, Quebec in Canada, and Catalonia in Spain – were chosen because they meet key criteria. First, two of the four cases, Norway-Sweden and the UK, yielded successful secession while the remaining two, Quebec and Catalonia, have not yet done so to date. Second, in three cases, the UK, Quebec, and Catalonia, there is ample opinion polling data on voters’ attitudes about status, material, and viability concerns. These three case studies will also be used in my regression analysis section. Unfortunately, Norway has

no such polling data available because of the early date the union dissolution was effectuated (1905). Nevertheless, there is ample historical accounting, both in books from the period and from newspaper stories, as well as economic and legislative data which allows me to extrapolate trends and demonstrate clear instances of status, material, and viability concerns.

Case Study 1. The Union of Norway-Sweden

As far back as the 1814 union between Norway and Sweden and their 1905 decision to dissolve that union, patterns of status, material and viability concerns are found. Although these trends must be demonstrated with historical exegesis in place of polling data, they are nonetheless visible. In-depth analysis shows that these trends are as plainly obvious in looking back at the early 20th century as they are in looking back to the 2016-2020 (projected) UKexit process.

Although the Norwegian King formally abdicated his role in 1814, the true date of union between Norway and Sweden was 6 August 1815 on which the Rigsakt (Act of Union) was signed.²⁹ The Norwegians clearly had always considered the Union to be in name only while retaining their sovereignty. The Norwegian addition to the Swedish King's address to his Parliament called for the "complete equality . . . of the two peoples" to avoid "subjugation" of one by the other.³⁰ There was always, however, a calculation by the Swedish crown that once the union was established concessions might be reneged upon and centrality accomplished under the Swedish throne. Evidence of this is available as early as a letter written by Swedish King Carl Johan, in which he expressed his desire to end the "Norwegian matter"³¹ as quickly as possible by granting some concessions which could simply be revoked at a later date.³²

The Union united Norway and Sweden under the Swedish Crown held by Carl Johan. Formally, this arrangement was intended to be a monarchical union, but not a parliamentary one. It allowed the independence of both states' legislatures and the maintenance of their laws and governments.³³ Nevertheless, the Rigsakt vested in the Crown the sole right of calling up both nations' troops, declaring war and concluding peace, and, critically, of all foreign policy including entering into and leaving treaties and appointing ambassadors.³⁴ As a result, although both nations were ostensibly equal in their union, to all outside observers it was the Swedish which were the dominant partner because their King handled all external interactions and was vested with the right of war and military action. Put simply, the Crown – perceived as Swedish – monopolized external relations and security.

Still, after the initial shock of union with Sweden, a relative quiescence prevailed in Norway. Indeed, a new wave of "Scandinavianism" circulated throughout the middle part of the

²⁹ Fridtjof Nansen, *Norway and The Union with Sweden*, reprinted July 1905, (New York: MacMillan and Co., Ltd.) 22.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

³¹ That is, to add Norway to the Swedish Kingdom as quickly as possible.

³² *Ibid*, 19, 20.

³³ *Ibid*, 23.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 25.

nineteenth century.³⁵ However, this goodwill was not to last and began to give way to separatist tendencies beginning in the latter half of the 1860s.³⁶ Popular newspapers at the time reported the Norwegian population were newly occupied with status concerns, asserting that Sweden was a tyrannical menace to Norway or claiming that Norway must seek to leave the union in order to improve.³⁷ Concerns of Swedish dominance were not without merit. Not only was Sweden economically and militarily superior to Norway on paper, primary source documentation from Swedish citizens shows full awareness of this superiority.³⁸ Rather than embracing the spirit of ostensible equality the union was intended to entail, it seems the Swedes and Norwegians were completely cognizant of the unequal roles each had in the union.

While feelings of general discontent continued to swirl throughout the 1860s, the impulse to dismantle the union politically ultimately came largely from the Norwegian *Venstre* party over the issue of foreign representation in consular offices. Popular politicians, including the victor of the 1884 election for Norwegian Prime Minister, gave rousing speeches against Sweden, charging that unionism was an existential threat to Norway.³⁹ In the beginning, sovereigntists demanded fundamental change to the structure of the union to prevent the subordination of Norway's goals to Sweden's. As I will show, the refusal of Sweden to make the concessions ultimately produced very real status concerns which galvanized the outright independence movements.

Status concerns, here emblemized by the conviction that Sweden thought itself the senior partner in the union and affronts caused by the unilateral Swedish representation of the union, were well documented at the time. On their face, these concerns might seem quite small, but in fact they are so basic to distinctiveness that to a sufficiently salient national identity they are necessities. Take for example Catalonia, which maintains foreign representation separate from Spain⁴⁰ and regularly jostles for status with the central state government.

Tendering their resignations to the King, Norwegian ministers resigned out of "loyalty to their mother country".⁴¹ Meanwhile, prominent Norwegians continued to give speeches disparaging the union's effects on Norway. One such speaker ended his diatribe with "Norway first and last", while another claimed that Norway had the original culture of Scandinavia.⁴² This latter speech further compounded calls for the reification of the Norwegian identity in a union dominated by Sweden.⁴³

Still, these arguments lacked external credibility without a precise metric to which secessionists could advert. Though they continued to vocally disparage the joint system of foreign affairs, which was predominantly directed by Swedish officials, and which, they argued, unfairly advantaged Sweden to the detriment of Norway, secessionists needed a new argument. The crux of the popular stance became that an independent Norway could negotiate its own trade

³⁵ Theodore Jorgenson, *Norway's Relation to Scandinavian Unionism 1815-1871*, (Minnesota: St. Olaf College Press, 1935), 382.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Lindgren, Raymond, *Norway-Sweden: Union, Disunion, and Scandinavian Integration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), 35.

³⁸ Jorgenson, *Norway's Relation to Scandinavian Unionism 1815-1871*, 304.

³⁹ Lindgren, *Norway-Sweden*, 57.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., the Generalitat's Brussels delegation website at http://exteriors.gencat.cat/en/ambits-dactuacio/afers_exteriors/delegacions_govern/ue/.

⁴¹ Lindgren, *Norway-Sweden*, 125.

⁴² Jorgenson, *Norway's Relation to Scandinavian Unionism*, p. 317.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

agreements, thereby tailoring them to Norwegian needs. Thus, anti-unionists in Norway began to use the idea that the union was negatively impacting their nation economically as a method by which they might show that the argument for independence was not merely viscerally oriented but had a quantifiable rationale.

Noted Scandinavian scholar Raymond Lindgren rejects the veracity this argument by pointing out that it was in fact a status concern held by the Norwegian public, rather than any measurable disadvantage that drove secessionist sentiment:

In reality, however, these arguments served only to prove a case of suppression of Norwegian political liberties. In their own eyes, they were capable of and possessed the right to foreign representation as one independent country in a union postulated on the merger of two sovereign states.⁴⁴

Moreover, an economic argument for dissolving the Norwegian-Swedish union lacks objective credibility. Not only was the Norwegian economy stronger as a result of the union with Sweden, but it actually declined and plateaued following the dissolution of the union. Indeed, there were never any serious economic tensions between Norway and Sweden until the late 1860s, and one would be hard pressed to find any way of looking at the economic outputs of the time to find that Norway was in any way disadvantaged or economically curtailed by the union. Labor productivity in the 19th century prior to the dissolution of the union in 1905 increased markedly, while labor productivity growth rates were far lower after the split.⁴⁵ Additionally, the period immediately following its independence, from 1900 to 1914, was relatively stagnant for GDP growth in Norway, and only improved nearly two decades later because of a second industrial revolution.⁴⁶

The point of highlighting this economic data is not to suggest that secession is bad. It serves merely to show that economic arguments in favor of secession lack objectivity, and, as a result, usually accuracy as well. Interestingly, although Norway did quite well after its secession, it did so not through negotiating trade deals, as was promised by the anti-unionists, but by industrializing its internal economy in place of a prior agrarian model. In 1905, few Norwegians could have foreseen that their economy would improve in this manner.

Norway's economic turnaround shows that a constituent part which secedes from the whole is not doomed to economic privation, but that it must work quite diligently to overcome the obvious disadvantages in severing an economy from a greater part. Had Norway not restructured its economy it would not have fared as well, because it had previously relied on the quasi-internal market of Sweden as a receptacle for its main export, agriproducts.

In 1903 Norway began to experience a dramatic restructuring of geopolitical influence within its union. This was effectively an equating force in the balance between the two nations as Norway became militarily and diplomatically comparable to Sweden. Two primary causes produced this equilibrating effect. First, Norway's military approached (and perhaps even surpassed) the capacity of the Swedish military, originally used so effectively to force the union in the first place. Second, the Norwegian foreign diplomatic presence and involvement on the continent grew to resemble the level of Sweden's. After this geopolitical rebalancing,

⁴⁴ Ibid, 63.

⁴⁵ Thorvald Moe, "The history of economic growth in Norway", *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 20, no. 2 (1972). <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03585522.1972.10407731>

⁴⁶ Ola Grytten, "A Norwegian consumer price index 1819-1913 in a Scandinavian perspective", *European Review of Economic History*, 8, no. 1 (2004).

Norwegians doubtless felt that they could do at least as well as Sweden if they dissolved the union, and it may even have smothered any popular sentiment in Norway that the economy had improved as a result of the union.

Case Study 2. The United Kingdom in the European Union

The United Kingdom, despite having been twice denied accession to the European Union by Charles De Gaulle, had held a privileged spot within the EU. Most famously, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher secured a rebate for the UK's contribution to the Common Agricultural Policy. This rebate in 2014 was more than €6 billion, reducing the contribution of the United Kingdom to the European Union's budget by fully 35%.⁴⁷ Another quirk of the unique British rebate was that any modification to it required British consent. The number as well as the sheer magnitude of the special treatments lent to the British through this rebate leaves little doubt as to why the French have called it "le chèque britannique" or the British check. Clearly, this is meant to be derogatory and conjure images of paying the British for promises of their good behavior.

One other famous example of British "special status" within the EU was the opt-out from the euro, the common currency of the Eurozone. What makes it such a remarkable exemption is then -Prime Minister John Major's insistence on and success in having it included in the Maastricht Treaty, the major document which transformed the European Community into the European Union. Indeed, of the 8 remaining member states of the EU who do not officially use the euro, all but Denmark are obligated to join the eurozone when their economies are deemed to be sufficiently convergent and stable to do so. The UK also has key opt-outs in the Schengen Zone, which allowed the United Kingdom to maintain its borders even with other EU member states. The UK also secured an explicit opt-out of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in Protocol 30 to the Treaty for the Functioning of the European Union, joining only Poland in an arrangement that makes clear that the Charter does not "create justiciable rights . . . except in so far as Poland or the United Kingdom has provided for such rights in its national law."⁴⁸ This is by no means an exhaustive list of the UK's negotiated opt-outs.

This special status notwithstanding, however, the representation of the United Kingdom inside the European Union was proportionally the same as any other member state. That is, the number of members the UK sent to the European Parliament was proportionally equal to its share of the total EU population, and, like all member states, the UK had representation in the form of 1 judge on the Court of Justice, 2 judges on the General Court, 1 Commissioner in the College of the European Commission, and 1 member (the Prime Minister) on the European Council. As a member of the EU, the UK could unilaterally veto any proposal relating to taxation, new treaties, the accession of new states to the Union, most foreign policy proposals, and EU-wide defense resolutions. Moreover, the UK had the third largest population in the EU,

⁴⁷ European Parliament figures available on their website at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2016\)577973](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2016)577973)

⁴⁸ A text of Protocol 30 is available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12008E%2FPRO%2F30>

making up just shy of 13% of the total EU population by itself.⁴⁹ As a result, the UK held an outsized role in qualified majority voting, the method by which most decisions are made in the European Council. For proposals made from the Commission, ratification of decisions required at least 16 of the 28 member states to agree AND countries representing at least 65% of the total population in the EU. This meant that of the 36% that could veto a proposal, the UK alone accounted for 36% of the required no vote. No objective outside observer would remark that this arrangement was unfair for the UK.

Nevertheless, the United Kingdom's status concerns motivating the decision to exit the European Union were obvious. First, the UK existed before the European Union, and was comprised mostly of people who, according to polling, considered themselves to be far more British than European. The majority of those who voted to leave in the 2016 referendum appeared to have believed that the EU threatened some national interest or otherwise limited the potential of the United Kingdom in some way.⁵⁰ The UK had established state institutions, a discrete and separable territory ready for secession, a people distinctive from the whole of the European Union, and, for some of its citizens, common interests which were both salient and perceived to be impacted negatively through union.

It is clear, not only from interviewing British politicians who supported Leave in the 2016 referendum on leaving the EU and from speaking informally to British citizens who also voted this way, but also from polling data that the primary motivator for their decision was that the UK should restore full control its own law-making. Lord Ashcroft's poll on the day of the referendum found that 49% of those who voted to leave did so because they believe in "the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK". A further 33% said that they did so because they felt that leaving "offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders".⁵¹ Just 5% cited the economy as their reason for leaving.⁵² Indeed, it seems that the economy in this instance was far more important to those who voted Remain: 43% said that they voted to remain because "the risks of voting to leave the EU looked too great when it came to things like the economy, jobs, and prices", while 31% voted to remain to retain access to the single market.⁵³ Every single politician from Northern Ireland whom I interviewed in 2018, including both the Democratic Unionists and the Ulster Unionists, mentioned their worries over the economic trouble projected to result from the decision to leave. Northern Ireland voted to remain by 56% to 44%.

Expressing dissatisfaction with how the negotiations had been conducted one Ulster Unionist MLA said, "if they'd have sorted out the trade relationships with the UK and the EU as a whole, the border issue in Ireland and Northern Ireland wouldn't be as complicated."⁵⁴ His point, as I take it, was that had the negotiators focused on how trade would operate post-UKexit, border reconciliation may have followed logically. This reaction illustrates the dichotomy between a unionist who must support the union's central government in Westminster and someone distant from the main leave sentiment focused on status. Instead of the rhetoric of someone who

⁴⁹ European Council demography figures available on their website at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00001>

⁵⁰ Lord Ashcroft Polls, Exit Polls, 23 June 2016.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See Table 1..

⁵⁴ 14 June 2018.

instigated an independence movement for status reasons, we see a rational mind focused on best navigating the decision of the union.

Most Ulster Unionist leaders now support leaving the European Union (although the UUP had advocated voting remain before the referendum). They do so not with the same zeal that an English Leaver might, but with the grudging acceptance of someone who has weighed the costs of remaining in each union – the UK and the EU – and accepted that the lesser of two evils is to remain with the number one trading partner, rather than the number two trading partner.

Among the British politicians whom I interviewed, the representatives from parties whose official platforms were to Remain, as well as those members of the Conservative and Labour parties who voted Remain, also mentioned the economy, while those who voted to leave or who were part of the government coalition (including DUP MPs in Westminster) mentioned their concerns over status. Both sets of officials did so without being prompted directly to give a reason for their decision – which is to say, their views on the subject followed as a result of discussing exiting the EU more broadly.

For example, a Conservative Party policy advisor who voted Leave, discussed only issues relating to status. “It’s not enough,” I was told, “[that the UK receives an equal voice in the Council or that there are 73 UK MEPs because there were] around 650 more MEPs [who weren’t from the UK, and who could influence the direction of European Union policy, and so affect policy in the UK as well]”.⁵⁵ This outlook represented no interest in the proportionality of representation, but rather concern about any division of decision-making power. When status concerns are so deeply ingrained as to oppose the fundamental concept of division of competences, they are unmanageable by standard concession tactics in negotiations. If this type of thinking becomes prevalent in an indifferent or already hostile population, it results in an uncompromising inclination to exit the union.

Critically, material concerns need not be rooted in fact; they must merely be perceived. According to one Liberal Democrat MP, there was “no logical economic basis” for voting Leave and the arguments for leaving “don’t bear up to scrutiny.”⁵⁶ The same MP also expressed concern at the eventual economic impacts of Brexit, mentioning that one of the most damaging effects could already be seen as EU businesses plan alternate routes to avoid the English port of Dover.

Take, for example, the now-infamous red bus which during the 2016 UKexit referendum promised to send to the National Health Service the £350 million/week the UK contributes to the EU budget. That figure never accounted for the £4 billion annual rebate that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher secured for the UK. The revised figure should have been in the area of £250 million/week, nearly 29% less than what was originally reported. If one accounts for the UK’s commitment to remain in some EU programs post-UKexit (Erasmus+, the Shared Prosperity Fund, etc.) and the UK’s commitment to replace fully the EU’s farming subsidies with a domestic equivalent, then the number falls to £57 million/week. Conservatively, that amounts to just 16% of what was promised, demonstrating how specious such claims were. This calculation does not take into account the divorce bill owed to the EU by the UK for its outstanding debts for ongoing EU projects, which is currently estimated at €40 billion. Given the impact of the quality

⁵⁵ 21 June 2018.

⁵⁶ 18 June 2018. NB, the Liberal Democratic Party maintains a pro-EU platform, even post-referendum.

of the data presented on referendums and the relatively short deliberative period in the leadup to the campaign, it follows that such poorly contrived figures may well have driven the debate.⁵⁷

The revised figure above is only the most basic accounting. In-depth analysis of the overall economic impact by the Treasury puts fifteen-year projections for the British economy at a loss of more than £250 billion if no post-withdrawal trade deal is achieved with the EU. The best case economic scenario, remaining in the Single Market and the Customs Union, would still negatively impact the economy to the effect of £52 billion, likely because of discrepancies in, for example, sanitary and phytosanitary standards, which would have to be checked before goods from the UK enter EU territory.⁵⁸

Within this theory's framework, therefore, the UK was perhaps a perfect contender for secession. The UK has a long and proud history, both military and diplomatic, in Europe and beyond. In 2016, according to the European Commission, by itself, the United Kingdom comprised fully 16% of the EU's economy as measured by GDP, second only to Germany. Perhaps those in the United Kingdom who voted to leave the European Union felt that they were such an integral part of the Union that they were comfortable leaving, expecting to have partially hobbled the European Union and trusting that they would be able to cope on their own as they had done before 1973.

For the UK, the same type of economic restructuring as had occurred in Norway is currently difficult to envision. Its financial services sector is already necessarily heavily integrated in the EU and so relies on the Union for quite a lot of its market. One LSE study predicted the loss of 60,000 jobs in the City of London alone.⁵⁹ According to the OECD, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has plummeted by more than 92% between 2016 and 2017 to the lowest levels since 2005.⁶⁰ European Union scholar J.J. Welfens draws a connection between FDI and inflow of technological innovation, leading to potential difficulties for the UK in remaining competitive in the global market.⁶¹

Case Study 3. Quebec in Canada

⁵⁷ Lawrence LeDuc, "Referendums and deliberative democracy" in *Electoral Studies* vol. 38, 2015.

⁵⁸ *Independent*, "British economy will £252 bn hit if Theresa May crashes UK out of the EU with no deal, analysis shows", written by Rob Merrick and published on 10 February 2018.

⁵⁹ Lindsey Naylor, "The Impact of Brexit on the City of London", presented at the LSE by Wyman Consulting, 20 February 2017.

⁶⁰ OECD, "FDI in Figures", April 2018.

⁶¹ Paul Welfens, *An Accidental Brexit*, (Germany: Palgrave Macmillan), 2017.

Canada is a federation consisting of three territories and ten provinces, of which Quebec is one. Francophones comprise more than 75% of the population in the province of Quebec.⁶² Canada's Constitution grants explicit equality both to English and to French, requires government offices to communicate with citizens in either language, and grants the right to citizens and officials to use either language in the federal Parliament and courts. The Constitution also grants citizens the right to have their children taught in English or French if that is the parents' first language, even if they reside in an area for which that language is the minority. Although most of Canada operates on common law, Quebec is unique in its operating on a civil law tradition which is modelled on French Napoleonic Code.⁶³ Since 1875, the Supreme Court of Canada has been required to consist of at least three judges from Quebec; the other judicial appointments are governed only by tradition so long as they live inside 40km of the National Capital Region,⁶⁴ a federal designation which includes Ottawa, the national capital of Canada, and Gatineau, the fourth largest city in Quebec. By tradition, the Canadian executive Cabinet represents the whole of Canada by selecting at least one minister from each province, including Quebec. Constitutionally, representation in the Canadian Parliament is fixed, and so Quebec has historically been more than proportionally represented for its population in the federal legislature. A provision in the Canadian Constitution grants each province authority over its own natural resources, including development, conservation, and taxation thereof.⁶⁵ Moreover, a system of opt-outs is inbuilt by a 1965 statute, which Quebec shepherded through the Canadian Parliament so they could opt out of proposed government programs.⁶⁶ The opt-out is now enshrined in the 1982 Canadian Constitution.⁶⁷ To maintain a level of civility, the Canadian government offers opt-outs to all provinces, but historically Quebec has been the only province to opt-out of federal programs.⁶⁸ At least by the letter of the law, it would be very difficult indeed to locate a grievance serious enough to amount to a real status concern.

The opposite of the economic veneer veiling status concerns seen in UKExit is found in the very genuine material concerns of Quebec's 1980 secessionist movement. In a book on the subject, Anne Griffin interviewed numerous citizens of Quebec.⁶⁹ Very few mentioned that they had any qualms with the federal Canadian government's decision making, even on behalf of Quebec. Instead, each of them took issue with what they felt was damaging and unfair taxation. No discernible status concern existed behind which to rally, and so this secessionist movement was unable to produce the same degree of mobilization success as that which emerged in the run-up to the 1995 referendum.

⁶² The Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Canada", written by David Bercuson, et al. Updated 18 Mar 2020, Accessed 21 March 2020.

⁶³ The Canadian Department of Justice, "Where our legal system comes from". Modified 16 October 2017. Available at <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/just/03.html>

⁶⁴ The Supreme Court of Canada, "The Canadian Judicial System". Modified 15 February 2018. Available at <https://www.scc-csc.ca/court-cour/sys-eng.aspx>

⁶⁵ Canadian Constitution, Section 92A.

⁶⁶ The Canadian Encyclopedia, "Opting-Out" written by Richard Simeon. Published 7 February 2006, edited 23 June 2015. Available at <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/opting-out>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ CBC, "NDP offers Quebec alone right to opt out of federally-funded programs" by Joan Bryden, published 2 October 2015. For an example of Quebec alone opting out of a federal parental leave initiative, see also The Globe and Mail, "Feds allow Quebec to opt out of national program" by Chris Lackner, published 21 May 2004.

⁶⁹ Anne Griffin, *Quebec, the challenge of independence*, (NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press), 1984.

As I will demonstrate both textually and with polling data, no status concern existed in Quebec of sufficient magnitude to mobilize the population to secession. Indeed, Quebec in the early 1980s had concerns which chiefly involved taxation. This case is further reinforced by Griffin's book. As one of Griffin's interviewees, a boisterous member of the Parti Quebecois who had twice stood for political office, mentioned, Quebec's economy could only be robust if it attained independence from Canada.⁷⁰ He stated, "we must be given our own governmental structures, and then . . . when we have acquired them . . . then we'll begin to do business."⁷¹ Several other respondents mentioned taxes and economic policy, but only one of them ever mentioned status issues. Thus, the majority of respondents mentioned the economy as their main reason for supporting secession or separatism, either directly by mentioning taxation or some related economic issue or indirectly by expressing their desire to reform or limit the central Canadian government's hold on Quebec for the purpose of reducing limitations on business and enterprise.

Tellingly, the one government official Griffin interviewed who *did* mention political and status aspects of the independence movement did so only in an attempt to leverage it as an issue into negotiations with the Canadian central government on healthcare reform.⁷² This official wanted to take relatively benign status concerns where they existed and use them to negotiate with Ottawa. This ulterior motive is a bargaining chip for concessions from the center rather than a bonified status concern. It would not be enough to mobilize secessionist sentiment.

The failed 1980 Canadian independence referendum is indicative of the fate to which secessionist movements which lack a strong sense of status concerns are confined. The populace may be disgruntled by economic disparities and taxation policies, but those are matters for reform and negotiation – they are never immediately the precipitant for independence. Possibly, however, a central government which refuses to negotiate with an independence movement (or, more realistically, a political party which backs independence) may provoke the conditions which constitute a status concern.

The second independence referendum of October 1995 came far nearer to a majority in favor of secession than did its predecessor in 1980, largely because of the initial emphasis on status that the secessionists introduced to the debate, especially as regards drafting the Canadian Constitution without Quebec's consent. Still, once the federalists turned the argument back to the economy, the secessionists were obliged to follow suit and support for secession subsequently began to drop.⁷³ Exemplary of this phenomenon is Lucien Bouchard's speech on 25 October, just five days before the referendum, in which he mentions status items in only a cursory manner and attributes it to the No side (that is, those who would vote no to an independent Quebec), and devotes the remainder of the speech to discussing economic and monetary union with Canada and debt and jobs in Quebec (Bouchard, 1995).⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Anne Griffin, *Quebec: The Challenge of Independence*, 1984, pp. 120-44.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 95-9.

⁷³ From a collation of speeches from key secessionists, such as Lucien Bouchard, with polling data collected by Maurice Pinard, available at Professeur Durand's website:

<http://www.mapageweb.umontreal.ca/durandc/?fbclid=IwAR0s4eDgSHQ-IfSYmWFK1-nbk1Y9N-nPwbo9MasLuQZiWpJqUs6pGVRZBs8>. See also Table 2 for this trend.

⁷⁴ A transcript is available here: <http://www.victoria.tc.ca/history/etext/bouchard.speech.oct2595.html>

Further corroboration of this trend can be found in Robert Young’s *The Secession of Quebec and the Future of Canada* and Maurice Pinard’s aggregate data set of polls. Table 2 has a tabulated representation of key figures. Young reports that at the outset of the referendum on secession, 44.4% of those polled indicated they would vote yes versus 45.3% who said they vote no.⁷⁵ Following a series of gaffes by the federalist side and an admirable job on the part of the secessionists in framing the debate around a subordinate and aggrieved relationship between Quebec and Canada, support for leaving Canada grew considerably. One specific gaffe which enraged sovereigntists was a remark made at a rally for the No side and encouraged No supporters to “crush [sovereigntists]” at the polls.⁷⁶ This and other remarks which were so on the nose that federalist leaders distanced themselves from both the remarks and speakers⁷⁷ were likely the nearest thing to genuine status concerns that sovereigntists held, as such statements minimized and excluded their place in the broader Canadian community. A subsequent poll placed the percentage of projected Yes voters nearly 5% higher at 49.2% compared to No’s 50.8%.⁷⁸

Seeing the shift toward support for leaving Canada, the federalist side began to restructure the debate toward the economy, forcing the secessionists to respond, as I have shown with Bouchard’s speech as a representative example, and turning the argument away from status concerns.⁷⁹ A poll conducted on 24 October,⁸⁰ just six days before the referendum and one day before Bouchard’s televised speech, reported a statistical tie. Finally, in a poll conducted by SOM Research and Surveys between 27 and 29 October (two days after Bouchard’s speech and one day before the referendum, respectively), fully 25% of respondents indicated either that they did not know or did not wish to answer when asked how they would vote in the referendum.⁸¹ This is indicative of a population which had been forced to reconsider its calculus in the face of such vastly restructured arguments just days before the referendum. In the end, the referendum result was incredibly close, reporting 50.2% no and 49.6% yes.

Table 2. Polling data and outcome of the 1995 Quebec Independence referendum

Date	% Yes	% No	Notes
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⁷⁵ Robert Young, *The Secession of Quebec and the Future of Canada*, Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998, p. 276.

⁷⁶ Young, *The Secession of Quebec*, 1998, 280.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 277-84.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

⁸⁰ Barrett, Edward, “What the polls reveal”, *Globe and Mail*, 24 October 1995.

⁸¹ Pinard’s data, see footnote 55.

17-23 Aug. 1995	44.4	45.3	When the referendum was announced
14 Oct. 1995	49.2	50.8	After the late September speech provoking sovereigntists
24 Oct. 1995	50.2	49.8	Before Bouchard's ill-fated speech which emphasized economic rather than status concerns
27-29 Oct. 1995	40.0	35.0	Inflection point following Bouchard's speech. 25% did not know or did not want to respond
REFERENDUM (30 Oct. 1995)	49.6	50.2	

Sources of data: Maurice Pinard's aggregated polling data set

Case Study 4. Catalonia in Spain

Spain is a federation⁸² consisting of three tiers of government: the central Spanish government, the provincial governments, and, of particular interest here, autonomous communities, including Catalonia. Section 149 of the Spanish Constitution reserves to the central government many of the competences one would expect any state government to maintain including defense, customs, monetary matters, international relations, and immigration. Section 148 enumerates the relatively comprehensive powers devolved to the autonomous communities. As far as I can tell, however, Spain is unique among federations in that Section 147, Clause 2, Sub-clause d allows prospective autonomous communities to create their own powers of those not explicitly reserved by the Constitution to the state, and contingent on approval by the Spanish Parliament. By tradition, autonomous communities may re-draft and re-submit their own autonomy statutes of the variety previously described by §167, c 2(d).

The latest iteration of the Catalan autonomy statute was approved in 2006, after much controversy including the Spanish Constitutional Court rewriting 14 articles outright. The preamble alone contains the word “self-government” four times in just 632 words. Several words, passages, and articles were re-written or removed by the Spanish Constitutional Court. In each instance, the stricken text was held to be an explicit arrogation of power or inclusion of Catalan institutions where the Spanish state held exclusive competence. For example, the first instance of stricken text appears in Article 6 of the Act. The Court deleted the words “and preferential” in the sentence “Catalan is the language of normal and preferential use. . . .” because it obviously conflicted with §3, c 1 of the Spanish Constitution. Other instances of text stricken for unconstitutionality include several attempts to insert Catalan institutions into processes already explicitly defined in or reserved to federal legislation by the Spanish Constitution. For example, the Act attempted to alter the composition of the Council of Justice of Catalonia by adding the president of the High Court of Justice of Catalonia in addition to the extant framework created by the federal Organic Act of Judicial Power. Although broadly accepted today that the Court was within its right to make these emendations by the authority vested in it by the Constitution, several scholars of the Spanish constitution had thought much of the issue non-justiciable.⁸³

Certainly, the ruling only added to the tensions between Catalonia and Spain. Before the Court ruled on the statute on 28 June 2010, the Catalan Centre for Opinion Studies (CEO) found in a study published on 21 May 2010 that 77.1% of Catalans polled classified the political situation in Spain as bad or very bad.⁸⁴ A month after the decision that number grew to 82.9%.⁸⁵ Just 7.5% of those polled thought the political situation was good or very good.⁸⁶

⁸² The field of political science is split over the exact political configuration of Spain. Few, however, deny that it has many federal elements and that since 1979 it has been on an increasingly federal trajectory. For these purposes, I will classify it as a federation because of its multiple levels of government which have explicitly enumerated and reserved powers granted to them by the Constitution.

⁸³ See, e.g., Gervasio Martín Martín, “Sobre las consecuencias jurídicas de la sentencia 31/2010, de 28 de junio, del tribunal constitucional sobre el estatuto de Cataluña” in *Revista de Derecho Político*, Madrid, no. 81, 2011.

⁸⁴ Centre d’Estudis d’Opinio, Barometre d’Opinio Política, 2^a onada 2010, 21 May 2010.

⁸⁵ Centre d’Estudis d’Opinio, Barometre d’Opinio Política, 3^a onada 2010, 30 July 2010.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Clearly Catalan secessionists espouse their own status concerns. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 states that “La Constitución . . . reconoce y garantiza el derecho a la autonomía de las nacionalidades y regiones que [España] integran . . .”.⁸⁷ This provision formally established that there exist historical and even state-legitimate national groups inside of discrete and separable regions. Whether one reads this provision as a concession by the central state to independentist groups or as merely recognition of the historical constituent parts of what has become the Spanish state, it is clear that there are several competing interests and identities at play.

Even inside Catalonia the interests at stake that could constitute a status concern vary considerably within independence and autonomist groups. For example, one Catalan Parliament Deputy in the Candidatura d’Unitat Popular (CUP) Party told me it was a matter of the right to self-determination rather than outright independence.⁸⁸ That is, Catalans should have the ability to hold a referendum on their own status, irrespective of the outcome. In contrast to CUP, the Esquerra Republicana (ERC) Party unabashedly aims for an independent Catalonia, saying explicitly on its website that the party pursues the “creation of an independent state for the Catalan nation”.⁸⁹ Obviously status concerns need not necessarily be held unanimously or with equivalent intensity among all potential separatist groups. Indeed, it is highly likely that multiple sovereigntist groups, each desiring varying degrees of autonomy up to and including independence, will arise in a system deemed sufficiently repressive to warrant an independence campaign.

The recent history of Catalonia has been one fraught with hostility on the part of both the Spanish federal government toward the Catalan government and vice versa. Following repressive drives by the central Spanish state both after the 2009-2012 non-binding referenda and the 2017 referendum which was (intended to be) binding, the desire for an independent Catalan state increased markedly. When Mariano Rajoy became Prime Minister of Spain in December of 2011, he began a series of hostile actions toward Catalonia. In his first year, his government failed to make a budget with Catalonia,⁹⁰ and, famously, in his last year in office before being ousted by a vote of no-confidence by his own party, Catalonia held its independence referendum despite strong discouragement from Rajoy’s government. A November 2013 poll found that 52% of Catalans were in favor of independence,⁹¹ a rare absolute majority. Even more surprising, the same poll found that only 24% of Catalans would vote against independence.⁹² Nevertheless, just two years later, 47.9% of Catalans would vote against independence with 43.7% saying they would vote in favor of independence.⁹³ As with the earlier referenda, the repressive, or oppressive, responses by the central state dramatically increased the desire for independence. Again in 2017, the resolute response by the Spanish central state toward both the referendum of 2017 and its organizers naturally exacerbated Catalan status concerns. In the 30 days following

⁸⁷ “The Constitution . . . recognizes and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions that comprise Spain. . . .”

⁸⁸ 1 Jul 2019.

⁸⁹ Available in English at <https://en.esquerra.cat/en>.

⁹⁰ Per Section 158 (1) of the Spanish Constitution, all autonomous communities must form a fiscal year budget with the federal legislature. Catalonia’s was the only one not approved by the Government, although it was approved by the Spanish Parliament. See, e.g., <https://www.catalannews.com/politics/item/the-spanish-budget-for-2012-violates-approved-laws-regarding-investment-in-catalonia>

⁹¹ La Vanguardia, “Diada: El 52% de los catalanes esta a favor de la independencia”, published 11 September 2013.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ La Vanguardia, “El ‘no’ a la independencia en Catalunya supera al ‘si’ por cuatro puntos”, published May 1 2015.

the referendum, the number of polled Catalans saying they would vote for independence rose more than 7 percentage points.⁹⁴ Despite these occasional spikes in secessionist sentiment, the overall trend in independence desire has been downward, with just 40.8% in favor a mere four months after the 2017 referendum.⁹⁵

In Spain, material concerns have also played a role in secessionist sentiment. Generally, economic rationales are employed frequently by autonomist and separatist movements. For example, the ERC manifesto maintains that “The creation of a state is a necessary tool for maximum economic well-being and social justice for the majority of citizens.” Taxation also plays a broader role in material concerns. Among secessionists and autonomists, generally, the prevailing consensus is that Catalans pay an inordinate amount in taxes in comparison with the other autonomous regions in Spain. The unionist response is best summed up by an interview I had with a Deputy from Partido Popular, a conservative party.⁹⁶ They agree that Catalans pay the highest taxes per capita, but they maintain that this is due in large part because the Catalan autonomous community government imposes the extra taxes, thereby making them higher than the countrywide average.

And in Spain, Catalonia has a long history of high degrees of high autonomy, having existed as a completely independent entity and as the senior partner of the Kingdom of Aragon. Coupled with the large contribution of Catalonia to the GDP of Spain, it is not difficult to imagine that some Catalans can envision a successful independent state, particularly one that is still inside the EU. Indeed, the most recently published annual report from the Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió shows that in 2017 only 35.2% of respondents considered independence in any way unviable.⁹⁷

Although status and material concerns as well as perceived independent viability are all present in the autonomist and secessionist movements in Catalonia, they are not shared evenly or with equal intensity throughout the region. The same annual report from the Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió in 2017 shows that the single largest concern in Catalonia was relations between Catalonia and Spain, but even this concern constituted less than half the population polled.⁹⁸ Further, although a majority of Catalans reported that their personal household income had dropped, they seemed largely to attribute that to the overall economic climate, rather than to actions by the central Spanish state. Table 3 illustrates the relationship between the general economic circumstances and Catalan opinion.

Definitionally, this economic outlook does not constitute a material concern per this theory’s framework, because the concern had not been imposed by the central state onto the region. Instead it is a fate shared by the whole region due to the overall economic climate from the preceding “Great Spanish Depression” of 2007-2014. Moreover, a month-by-month polling analysis shows that Catalans thought the economy was getting better in 2017, as the Spanish

⁹⁴ La Vanguardia, “El si a la independencia se impone tras dispararse ocho puntos según el CEO”, published 31 October 2017.

⁹⁵ La Vanguardia, “El apoyo a la independencia baja al 40,8% y el rechazo sube al 53,9 según el CEO”, published 23 February 2018.

⁹⁶ 5 Jul 2019.

⁹⁷ Generalitat de Catalunya, Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió Anuari 2017, May 2018. Only 2.8% of respondents explicitly said that Catalonia was unviable; I have tabulated several concerns which relate in some aspect to viability. See Appendix A for breakdown.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

government navigated the economic crisis and the worldwide and European economies simply improved.⁹⁹

Table 3. Opinion on the Economic Situation in Catalonia versus actual GDP per capita

Date	% Bad or Very Bad	% Good or Very Good	GDP per capita (thousands of USD)
October 2008	55.9	19.8	35.366
January 2009	69.0	14.7	
November 2009	66.0	12.9	32.042
January 2010	69.4	13.9	
October 2010	72.7	12.0	30.502
January 2011	75.7	11.2	
October 2011	84.6	6.9	30.502
February 2012	83.7	7.9	
October 2012	86.9	6.2	28.324
February 2013	89.0	4.6	
November 2013	87.6	7.8	29.059
March 2014	78.7	9.6	
October 2014	77.6	11.5	29.461
February 2015	76.5	10.9	
October 2015	66.0	15.9	25.732
March 2016	64.2	16.4	
November 2016	61.7	21.8	26.505
March 2017	53.1	26.6	
October 2017	43.1	41.9	28.100

Data Sources: Centre d'Estudis D'opinio Anuari 2017 and World Bank "GDP per capita (current US\$) – Spain"

This review suggests that Catalonia would almost certainly not vote to become independent, even in a referendum with appropriate turnout (more than the 40% of the 2017 referendum) and that was sanctioned by the central Spanish state. Later regression analysis will demonstrate this suggestion. Not only are the constituent sentiments of secessionism a minority propensity in Catalonia, but those reporting them are split between full independentist movements and less extreme autonomist ones.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Toward a predictive modeling: regression analysis

If secessionism in popular opinion is indeed based on the three variables I have laid out in this paper, and if these sentiments can be accurately assessed by opinion polling, then it follows that regression analysis of these sentiments will reveal a relationship. This type of regression could even render a model which can be used to predict when a majority Yes vote in an independence referendum would occur based on opinion polling before the referendum takes place.

Given the extremely limited sample size of instances of secession which include even approximately appropriate polling (i.e., that ask opinions on status, material, and viability concerns), only eight cases are presented here. Nevertheless, they span more than two decades and occurred in two continents. Six are constituent parts of recognized countries and the remaining seventh case is of a recognized country from an international confederation (the UK's departure from the EU).

The cases are also representative in one other key area: the timeframe in which the data was taken relative to the timing of a referendum or other provocations. The Canadian case comes from polling data in 1995 taken *before* the referendum was announced. This means that no mainstream political dialogue influenced the respondents. At the other extreme, the UK polling data was taken as an exit poll of the actual referendum itself, meaning that respondents surely had the clearest conception in mind of their exact opinions at the time. Happily, the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinio in Catalonia does regular polling, providing five samples for this study. One of them, from 2011, provides data from just after the Spanish Constitutional Court rewrote 14 articles of the new Catalan Autonomy Statute. Another, from 2017, was collected the same year that Catalonia had its independence referendum which was deemed unconstitutional. The other three cases, from 2012, 2013 and 2014, may be taken as broadly representative of the standard state of political affairs in Spain and of the kind of relationship that Catalans have with the Spanish central government. Finally, the Scottish case consists of data collected from 15-17 September 2014 regarding the referendum to take place on 18 September. The Scottish polling, then, takes place after the debate on independence vs unionism made by political elites and academics, but before the referendum itself. This makes it highly interesting for predictive purposes. The results of all cases are tabulated below, and the data used for the model is provided in Appendix A.

Tables 4-6 provide statistical correlations between the outcome of a referendum (or a projected referendum in the case of opinion polling-only data) and opinion polls on the three variables I have described. Status concerns are highly significant, viability slightly less so, and material concerns are just barely significant. I attribute the latter two decreases in significance to lack of exactly worded opinion polls. As can be seen in Appendix A, the questions used to determine viability concerns are unfortunately almost entirely just surrogates, and the questions used to determine material concerns are usually unable to discern between general economic concern (in the case of the recession in Spain, for example (and which I do not define as material concerns)) and concerns which are attributed to a central government negatively impacting a region (which definitionally *are* material concerns). Additionally, for material concern polling, because the questions were not precise enough to delineate blame vs burden, the numbers particularly for Catalonia will be skewed due to the previously referenced depression in Spain. I

attribute the low statistical significance to that skewing. As a result, I also provide Table 7 which shows the relationship between outcome and material concerns *without* the Catalan cases. It then returns a highly significant correlation.

Table 4. Regression Analysis of Status Concerns and Independence Vote Outcome

	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	26.65882	4.27297	6.239	0.000785***
Status Concerns	0.46428	0.08005	5.800	0.001152 **
			Adj. R²	0.8234
			p-value	0.001152

Significance: *** 0.001, ** 0.01

Table 5. Regression Analysis of Material Concerns and Independence Vote Outcome

	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	29.7382	9.8533	2.917	0.0267 *
Material Concerns	0.4582	0.2031	2.256	0.0649 ▶
			Adj. R²	0.3687
			p-value	0.06495

Significance: * 0.05, ▶ 0.1

Table 6. Regression Analysis of Viability Concerns and Independence Vote Outcome

	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	24.9075	7.8864	3.158	0.0196 *
Viability Concerns	0.4561	0.1373	3.322	0.0160 *
			Adj. R²	0.589
			p-value	0.01597

Significance: * 0.05

Table 7. Regression Analysis of Material Concerns and Independence Vote Outcome with Catalan Cases Removed

	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	Pr(> t)
Material Concerns	1.814850	0.004884	371.6	0.00171 **
			Adj. R²	1
			p-value	0.001713

Significance: ** 0.01

Table 8 shows the numbers used to generate the regressions and the subsequent Figure 1. This table format is helpful to visualize the overall trends without statistical assistance.

Table 8. Data Input for Regression

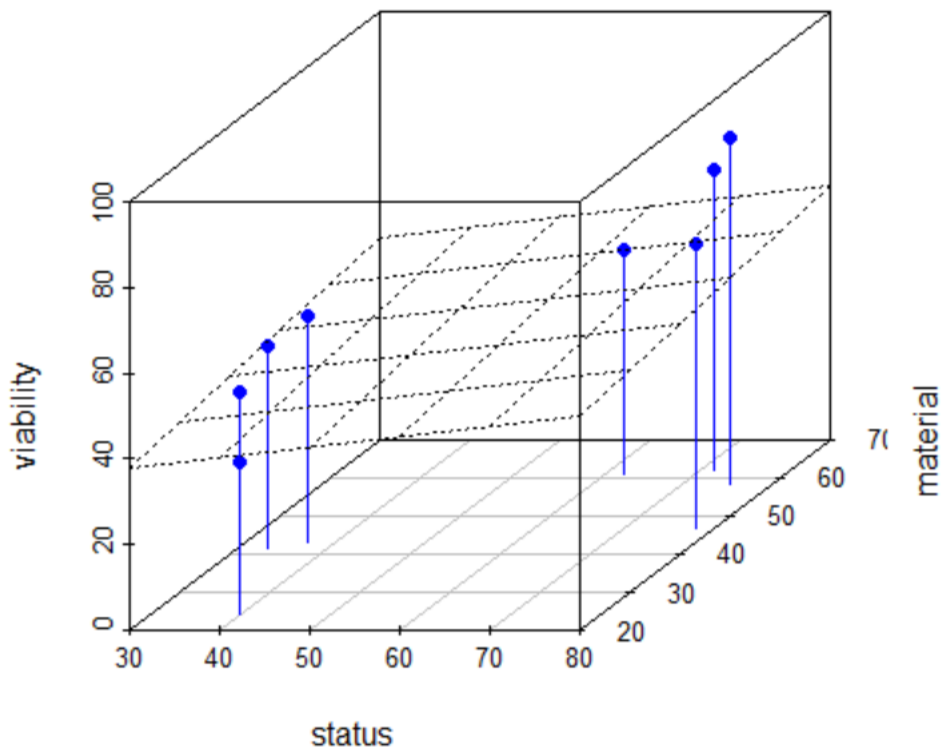
Entity	Outcome (% Yes)	Calc'd. Status (%)	Calc'd. Material (%)	Calc'd. Viability (%)
Scotland (2014)*	44.7	37.0	43.0	53.0
UK (2016)*	52.0	55.0	47.0	66.0
Catalonia (2011)	45.4	65.3	41.8	47.1
Catalonia (2012)	57.0	71.6	62.1	70.1
Catalonia3 (2013)	54.7	70.4	60.9	52.5
Catalonia4 (2014)	64.2	50.6	58.5	80.6
Catalonia5 (2017)	48.7	62.0	24.5	35.2
Canada (1995)	35.3	32.5	37.8	40.0

* Denotes an actual referendum which has already occurred.

The results of this regression are presented visually in Figure 1. In the figure each of the three variables has its own axis, with each case plotted inside the cube. The regression equation for all three variables is used to generate a plane showing where each case lies in terms of how high or low its outcome is in a referendum or, in the case of polling-only data, a projected referendum.

Figure 1. Visual Representation of Regression Equation

Outcome as a function of Status, Material, & Viability



Concluding Remarks and Future Work

In this paper I have utilized historical exegesis, qualitative interviews, and statistical analysis to track the same three commonalities through centuries of secession and across continents. I by no means claim that this is *the* authoritative text on secession, and, indeed, I intend this paper to be merely preliminary work toward a comprehensive and predictive modeling. Nevertheless, it seems clear that status, material, and viability concerns are central to the formation and reification of secessionist sentiment.

Two points above others deserve special re-emphasis. Primarily, for the framework of this theory, what is important is not the actual attitude or acts from the center toward a region, nor the objective state of the economy, nor even whether a region would truly be viable as an independent state. Rather, what is important are the feelings of the public on these matters, or, in the case of a referendum, the feelings of the voters. Second, it bears further emphasis that secessionist movements will begin with these sentiments in mind. The success or lack thereof in any movement is contingent on any number of factors that this framework cannot possibly include in any comprehensive fashion. In a word, these variables are necessary but not sufficient for successful independence movements.

Future work has a desperate need in for-purpose polling. The use of surrogate questions in extant polling has obviously weakened the statistical analysis used in this paper. Even more regrettable is that in many cases there is no extant polling. New Caledonia held an independence referendum to determine its status with France in 2018. It was widely expected to return an overwhelming majority in favor of remaining a part of France. Whether because of a presupposed blowout or because no one attached enough importance to New Caledonia's future to spend the money, no opinion polling information was collected. The result, however, was far from the overwhelming majority many had expected. Instead, it was 56.4% in favor of remaining and 43.6% in favor of seceding. New Caledonia is legally entitled to hold another referendum in September 2020, and for-purpose opinion polls gauging the three concerns I have elaborated here might allow a glimpse at the result of the referendum before it occurs. Naturally, this type of polling would have applications both for secessionists and unionists in directing the conversation and structuring debate.

Because the impacts – economic and political, but also to the day-to-day rhythms of individuals' lives – of secession cannot be overstated, it is imperative to understand the origins of secession. It is crucial to have this understanding both to avert potentially cataclysmic secessions in instances in which secession will dramatically decrease quality of life or countries' prospects for success, and also to manage secessions which are in some way justified, guiding them to a fruitful telos. While I do not claim this work can do that, I hope it has made some headway into a formal modeling from which some useful conclusions may be drawn or some important framework be built.

Appendix A. Opinion Polling Sources

1. The UK

Source: Lord Ashcroft Polling, Exit Polls, 23 June 2016.

n = 12,369

Outcome: The outcome is from the 2016 referendum on continued membership in the European Union (52%)

Status: All respondents who responded that “Rights for people in the UK” would improve outside of the UK (55%)

Material: All respondents who said “the economy as a whole” would be “Better if the UK leaves the EU” (47%)

Viability: All respondents who believed the “EU needs the UK more” than the UK needs the EU (66%)

Rationales: All questions were taken from the same base pool of 12,369 respondents.

The status concern question was chosen because if people believe rights for UK citizens inside the EU are in some way less than they would be if they were not in the union, it suggests that the EU is in some way diminishing those rights. This creates the belief that status would be better outside the union than in it.

The material concern question was chosen because if people feel the economy would be better outside of the union, it suggests that the EU is in some way reducing the UK’s material opportunities.

The viability concern question is unfortunately a surrogate. Presumably, if these individuals think the EU needs the UK more than vice versa, they believe the UK is viable on its own. This is likely a conservative number, as it stands to reason that more than 66% of British citizens think the UK is viable on its own.

2. Scotland

Source: The Scotsman, Scotland Independence Poll, 12-16 September 2014.

n = 1,175

Outcome: The outcome is from the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence. (55.3%)

Status: All respondents who answered that there would be less inequality in Scotland if Scotland became an independent country. (37%)

Material: All respondents who said it would be good for Scotland’s economy if Scotland became an independent country. (43%)

Viability: All respondents who said yes to “Do you agree that Scotland could be a successful independent country?”

Rationales: All questions were taken from the same base pool of 1,175 respondents. The status concern question was chosen because those who feel there would be less inequality in Scotland if, *ceteris paribus*, Scotland were independent presumably feel that being a part of the United Kingdom in some way negatively impacts their social status. The material concern question was chosen because those who feel that Scotland’s economy would improve – or in the wording of the poll, that it would be good for Scotland’s

economy – outside of the UK must feel that the UK is putting some limiting factor on Scotland’s economy. The viability question is a prime example of the kind of question that *should* be asked to avoid poor surrogate stand-ins. It is almost literally asking about the viability of independent Scotland.

3. Quebec

Source: ICPSR, report #3726, “Quebec Sovereignty Referendum Study, 1995”, February 2005.

n = 2177

Outcome: All respondents declaring they were “very favourable” or “somewhat favourable” to full independence for Quebec.

Status: All respondents who agree with the statement that Quebec has a rightful place as an independent nation.

Material: All respondents responding that the federal government’s economic performance has been either a “poor job” or a “very poor job”. All respondents who said that a sovereign Quebec would be better off economically than in a united Canada.

Viability: All respondents who listed as the most important reason they would vote no as either: “fine as we are now”, “prefer known to uncertainty”, “to avoid strife”, “strength in numbers”, “stability”, “Quebec could not survive alone economically”, “too expensive to separate”, “fear uncertainty”, “distrust [ANY SOVEREIGNTIST POLITICIAN]”, “keep economic stability”, “uncertain about [ANY SOVEREIGNTIST POLICY]”, “Quebec is not ready for separation”, “afraid of the future if ‘YES’ wins”

Rationale: The outcome question was chosen because it reflects strong yes and lean yes for who would vote for an independent Quebec. The status concern question was chosen because the use of “rightful” suggests both/either that there is a parity concern between Canada and Quebec and/or some indignation has prompted a self-government interest in Quebec. The material question was chosen because it very closely models the intent of my definitional operationalization – that is, it measures how much of the *blame* the potential secessionists place on the central government. The viability questions were chosen because it encompasses any potential reason – economic, political and geopolitical realism – that individuals would think Quebec is unviable as an independent state. Critically, this percentage is subtracted from 100%, because presumably the other No respondents did not think viability was an issue, and obviously all Yes respondents think an independent Quebec is viable.

4. Catalonia

Source: Centre d’Estudis d’Opinio, *Anuari 2011, Anuari 2012, Anuari 2013, Anuari 2014, Anuari 2017*. These are annual reports from the Catalan government’s statistics and polling office.

Outcome: All respondents who answered that they should Catalonia should be an independent state.

Status: All respondents who thought there was an insufficient level of autonomy in Catalonia. For the year 2014 this question was not asked, and I instead used those respondents who identified as more Catalan than Spanish or only Catalan.

Material: All respondents who answered that the biggest problem facing the Catalan economy is “unemployment and precarious employment”.

Viability: All respondents who listed their reason for saying they would vote no on a referendum for Catalan independence as one of either: “not positive for Catalonia,” “no firm plan established for independence, “Catalonia would be unviable [as an independent state]”, “the process [for independence] would not be viable”, or that it would “worsen the outlook for Catalonia” AND those listing their reason for saying they would abstain on such a referendum as one of either: “Catalonia would be unviable [as an independent state]” or “the process [for independence] would not be viable”.

Rationale: Given the extreme level of surrogacy in these questions, much more justification here is warranted. First, although Catalonia did indeed have a referendum on independence in 2017, it was unconstitutional according to their Constitutional Court. Moreover, the unionist parties encouraged their supporters to stay home and the Spanish police raided polling stations, forcing the turnout rate to 42%. Between the purposive abstentions (by not voting) and the repression from the central state, such a referendum would not be representative of the whole nation. The status question was chosen because interviews I conducted with Catalan autonomist and secessionist parties suggest that Catalans view the Spanish state’s refusal to grant more autonomy as an affront to the historical independence of Catalonia and a refusal to recognize them fully. As a result, many Catalans undoubtedly conflate the inability to fully self-govern with status concerns. The material concerns question was chosen because, again through interviews conducted, many Catalans believe that either lack of action or bad action from the Spanish government was responsible for any change to Catalan employment numbers. The viability concern question was chosen because it quite literally provides an option on viability. Unfortunately, it splits this option between concerns over viability of a Catalan state and the viability of the process which would need to be undergone for independence. It also provides options relating to geopolitical and economic independence. It is reasonable to think that many respondents had *all* of these reasons in mind, because the survey allowed selection of only one option. Critically, this percentage is subtracted from 100%, because presumably the other No respondents did not think viability was an issue, and obviously all Yes respondents think an independent Catalonia is viable.

Table 8. Showing the percentages used once more

Year	Outcome	Status	Material	Viability
2011	45.4	33.2	41.8	47.1
2012	57.0	71.6	62.1	70.1
2013	54.7	62.2	60.9	52.5
2014	64.1	75.3	58.5	80.6
2017	48.7	39.7	24.5	35.2

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