# Literature Review

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The literature on ethnic conflict is empirical and theoretically rich yet it has trouble explaining the key question: why do certain relatively affluent, democratic and (as defined by the literature) non-deprived, minority regional governments want to secede? As will be explored in some detail, certain cases like Scotland, and Catalonia are glaring "false negatives" since the literature would predict that their governments would not try to make separatist demands, and yet they do. Likewise, the literature focuses more on violence and protests rather than the demands for secession. This latter point is problematic since, as a field, it overlooks the creation of secessionist claims which could be a precursor to violent conflict later on. Thus, this review will seek to cover the major theories on secession in politcal science and why they do not explain variation in these cases.

## Opportunity

Broadly speaking, the opportunity literature argues that civil conflict is driven by conditions that allow rebels to exist in the first place (Sobek 2010). Most famously, these opportunities include state weakness (Fearon and Laitin 2003), low national income and high natural resources (Collier and Hoeffler 2002), geographic concentration of an ethnic group (Weidmann 2009; Morelli 2013), and irregular politics (Gleditsch and Ruggeri 2010). These opportunities are applicable for all rebel movements and all kinds of civil conflict, including secession (Boyle and Englebert 2006).

This theory inadequately explains certain cases of rebellion for a number of reasons. Firstly, this paper is looking to explain the demands for secession, rather than violence or even protest. Since demands are fundamentally speech acts (more specifically, speech acts by government officials), they do not necessitate special conditions to allow them to happen-the way conditions might be required for rebels to exist-it is much less applicable for this paper. Put simply, while a rebel group might need a favorable environment to exist, recruit, launch attacks and so on; a government official only needs media or a public forum to make a secessionist claim.

Secondly, even if the literature was concerned with demands rather than violence, none of the explanations fit these cases because the secessionist regions are in countries that lack these opportunities. To start, both countries are high income, strong states that have not had irregular politics or transitions close to when secessionism was occurring. The closest to this latter theory is Spain's transition to democracy in 1979 but that transition happened long before the recent movement for secession. In sum, this literature and its theories do not explain my cases.

## Relative deprivation

Relative deprivation argues that ethnic groups rebel or try to secede when they are systemically oppressed by other ethnic groups in the country. Beginning with Ted Gurr (1970) and Donald Horowitz (1985), this literature observes many different kinds of grievances ranging from wealth inequalities with other ethnic groups (Cederman et al. 2011) as well as discrimination and systemic violence by the state (Horowitz 1981). Perhaps the most pertinent to this paper is Horowitz's (1981) examples in which richer minorities attempt to separate from the state. He has argued that "advanced" (relatively wealthier) ethnic groups only pursue separatism immediately following "serious collective violence" such as massacres by the state (200). That is, they are only motivated by serious violence to start their own state. However, this does not explain separatism in these regions.

Firstly, all of these regions are wealthier (with the exception of Wales) than the average so it is not a case of ethnic wealth inequality. Secondly, only systematic violence is said to provoke wealthier groups to try to form their own state. As of the last few decades, there clearly have not been systemic massacres in Scotland or Catalonia. That is not to say that these regions do not have legacies of systematic violence: the case of Spain under Franco is explicitly mentioned by Horowitz as an example (1981). However, these regions would need to secede as an immediate response to violence, which was not observed since the transition to

democracy in 1979 in Spain and for centuries in the case of Scotland. In sum, the relative deprivation does not explain variation in these regions since they lacked deprivation.

## Relational-Materialist

Another important theory is the relational-materialist hypothesis proposed by Robert Hale. For Hale (2008), ethnic regions are motivated towards decentralization but, if independence is seen as leading to a better economy, and the state is not likely to use violence to stop it, then regions will engage in secession. As Hale notes, minorities are worried about a situation where "the [r]egion is [economically] worse off... than would most likely be the case if the [r]egion were instead an independent state encountering no resistance on the part of [the center's] authorities," (65-66). This is different from the relative deprivation literature in that the only "deprivation" is the potential of a smaller economy under incorporation with the state. Likewise, it is not interested in fiscal distribution, but rather economic conditions as a whole (Hale 2008, Chapter 8). Finally, it is perhaps one of the few literatures that studies the demands for secession rather than just activism or violence.

However, this theory is problematic when applied to the cases of interest. Hale (2008) modelled the theory on the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, which was a clear instance when many regions would benefit economically if they became independent. However, it is not clear that the regions this paper would be economically better off if they were independent. In fact there is quite a lot of evidence to the contrary: studies of Scotland and Quebec (both of which were allowed independence per Hale's theory) found that they would be worse off economically even under favorable trade terms in the case of Scotland (Grady et al. 1992; Armstrong and Ebell 2014). A similar study of Catalonia found that, under favorable trade conditions, independence would make no difference on its economic output (Pons-Benaiges 2017). In sum, economic motivations cannot explain these cases since most estimates suggests could be worse off with independence.

## Fiscal Appeasement

The fiscal appeasement literature looks at subnational funding of regions (minority or otherwise) but it asks the opposite question: why do states fund regions in a particular way? In this work, the possibility of secession is one answer among many. Daniel Triesman largely started the literature with a 1996 paper on Russia that begins by asking, "why [do] some regions currently receive large net transfers (subsidies, grants, other benefits) from the centre while others pay large net taxes..." (299). Triesman's answer is a region's overall discontent with the center as well as a minority regions' propensity to secede. He argues that to preemptively counter threats, Russia spent more to placate dissatisfied regions. The theory has since performed well when tested on funding of regions in India (Aleman and Treisman 2005) but, it has had had varying results when tested on funding of federal regions globally (Bakke and Wibbels 2006)4 and finally, it performed well when tested on funding in response to how regions voted in the 2005 Ethiopia election (Ishiyama 2012).

While the literature is innovative in looking at fiscal distribution and propensity for separatism, it has two major issues. First, it does not ask why separatism happens, but rather why funding is given out in a particular way. As the theory of this paper will explore further, it is not just a matter of reversing the variables. To understand secessionist demands, one needs to look at both aspects: how minority regions are preemptively placated with spending but also and how variation in spending affects demands to separate.

Secondly, perhaps because these papers are studying preemptive threats, they tend to use very short time periods. For instance, Ishiyama (2012) only studied one year of funding in Ethiopia. In rare cases when more time is used and it has separatism as the dependent variable, the study does not observe demands. For instance, Bakke and Wibbels (2006) are an exception since they do study changes over a long period and they use separatism for their dependent variable but unlike the previous papers-Triesman (1996,1998) in particular-they do not observe secessionist demands. Ultimately, this literature comes close but never quite puts together all the needed elements. Of the three aspects needed for this research-studying demands, separatism as the outcome variable and a relatively long time sample, a study might have two, but never all three.

### Globalization

Finally, perhaps the closest theory to this project is how globalization-that is, economic integration-increases the likelihood of secessionism. Firstly, it is worth noting that there is not a clear consensus within this research over whether globalization makes secession more likely (Sambanis 2006; McHenry 2009). However, to the extent that there are arguments for globalization increasing separatism, they come in two forms (Sorens 2004). The first is that globalization directly increases support for secessionist parties because of economic dissatisfaction. For instance, Zirakzadeh (1989) has argued that unemployment leads to increased secessionist party support in the Basque region and Scotland. More recently, Hopkin (2016) has pointed to European Union austerity following the 2008 economic crisis as a catalyst for secessionism in Catalonia and Scotland. In this mechanism, economic dissatisfaction leads to support for a new state which is more protectionist and socially generous.

The second mechanism is more counter-intuitive, it proposes that globalization gives regions economic leverage to threaten secession in order to get concessions from the center (Sorens 2004). It argues globalization economically benefits minority regions and governments implement more political decentralization to facilitate these regions' growth. As a result, minority regions threaten secession when they do not get sufficient political decentralization or other economic benefits from the center. Therefore, these theories are clearly the closest for this project since it deals with secessionist demands, is looking at funding as a possible mechanism and even uses the same cases.

Why then, is it insufficient at answering the question? First, the mechanisms are indeterminant for figuring out which minority regions become secessionist (and which do not). Sorens (2004) says this explicitly, writing "...this paper deals only with the over-time determinants of secessionism. It does not seek to address the cross-sectional determinants of secessionism..." (732). Since globalization affects countries at the national level, it does not explain the subnational variation for different minority regions in the same country.

Second, while the literature does suggest that globalization leads to distributional conflicts which can lead to secessionism (Sorens 2004; Hopkin 2016), it is surely not the only factor to do this. One can imagine situations such as right-wing populist parties winning elections which might eschew austerity but might decrease minority spending because of their (majority) nationalist platform. Thus, it is better to think of proximate causes for separatism and to remain agnostic about the different processes that go into those causes. In sum, this literature comes very close to answering the question but is crucially unable to account for subnational variation or possible circumstances when globalization might not be the driver of secessionist sentiment.

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