

## Mapping Regionalism and Secessionism: A New Dataset of Territorial Demands in the EU

Jordi Mas, Marc Sanjaume-Calvet & Ivan Serrano

To cite this article: Jordi Mas, Marc Sanjaume-Calvet & Ivan Serrano (01 Aug 2025): Mapping Regionalism and Secessionism: A New Dataset of Territorial Demands in the EU, *Ethnopolitics*, DOI: [10.1080/17449057.2025.2532317](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2025.2532317)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2025.2532317>



[View supplementary material](#)



Published online: 01 Aug 2025.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 99



[View related articles](#)



CrossMark

[View Crossmark data](#)

# Mapping Regionalism and Secessionism: A New Dataset of Territorial Demands in the EU

JORDI MAS \*, MARC SANJAUME-CALVET \*\* &  
IVAN SERRANO 

\*Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain, \*\*Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain

**ABSTRACT** This article introduces a novel cross-sectional dataset capturing electoral support for regionalist and secessionist parties across all EU-27 regions and the UK, based on data collected between 2010 and 2022. We map and categorize territorial demands as either internal (regionalist) or external (secessionist) self-determination. This allows for a comprehensive approach to the regional question, from salient territorial conflicts such as Catalonia, Corsica or Scotland but also enabling comparative analysis between regions with and without territorial demands, thus avoiding selection bias. It provides scholars with new tools to explore the patterns, causes, and intensity of territorial politics in the EU through electoral data, regional socioeconomic indicators, and public opinion variables.

## 1. Introduction

The 2017 unilateral referendum on independence in Catalonia (Castellà, 2018; Della Porta & Portos, 2021; López & Sanjaume-Calvet, 2020; Requejo & Sanjaume-Calvet, 2019; Rodríguez-Teruel & Barrio, 2021) reignited scholarly interest in regionalist and secessionist movements across Europe. The Catalan case unfolded alongside the UK's territorial tensions, notably the 2014 Scottish independence referendum (Cetrà & Harvey, 2018; Keating, 2017) and the 2016 Brexit vote (Sanjaume-Calvet et al., 2023). Simultaneously, various regionalist movements, particularly in the Basque Country and Corsica, transitioned from non-institutional activism to more conventional electoral politics (Fazi, 2013; Sanjaume-Calvet, 2011), signalling a strategic shift in how these groups engage with political systems.

These developments underscore the need for a broader analytical lens to study regionalist and secessionist demands, especially within the context of the EU's multilevel governance. Such demands are not confined within national borders; they resonate with broader European integration dynamics (Jordana et al., 2018; 2019). A comprehensive analysis that incorporates electoral behaviour allows scholars to address the intricate

---

\*Correspondence Address: Marc Sanjaume-Calvet. Email: marc.sanjaume@upf.edu

geographical patterns and underlying causes of these movements. Situating them within a shared EU regional framework facilitates the identification of commonalities and the discovery of new explanatory variables.

The article introduces an electoral mapping of territorial demands across EU regions, based on an original dataset compiled from multiple sources. This dataset captures electoral outcomes of all non-state-wide parties (NSWPs) across European regions from 2010 to 2022 (See Section 3). Being based on the NUTS nomenclature with our own review of all regions across Europe we conceive the dataset as an open design that can be expanded in the future, both horizontally with new variables of interest and also incorporating electoral results. The wide range of variables provides a versatile tool for researchers focusing on territorial politics. Section 4 discusses possible analytical uses of the dataset, showcasing its potential to enrich empirical studies on regionalist mobilization and political dynamics.

While the central contribution lies in presenting this dataset, the article also aims to engage with empirical literature on regionalist and secessionist movements. Prior studies (Álvarez Pereira et al., 2018; Brancati, 2014; Elias et al., 2021; Griffiths, 2016; Griffiths & Martinez, 2021; Massetti & Schakel, 2013; Sambanis et al., 2018; Sorens, 2004; 2005; 2008; 2012) have laid important groundwork, and this new resource builds upon and extends those efforts. By offering both data and interpretive pathways, the study contributes to a more systematic and nuanced understanding of sub-state political dynamics in Europe.

## 2. Background and Datasets

### 2.1. Territorial Politics and Data

The study of territorial politics has yielded several datasets that capture various expressions of territorial demands, typically using subnational units as the unit of observation. A prominent example in the institutional realm is the Regional Authority Index (RAI) (Hooghe et al., 2016; Shair-Rosenfield et al., 2021), which examines the dimensions of institutional self-rule and shared rule across regions in nearly 95 countries from 1950 to 2018 (for other similar measurements of decentralization, see for instance Brancati, 2006; Dardanelli et al., 2019; Requejo, 2005). Similarly, the TERRGO project (Trinn & Schulte, 2020) categorizes 96 countries, including Western and non-Western democracies, semi-democracies, and selected autocratic regimes between 2000 and 2018, into one of eight types of territorial self-governance based on constitutional status and self-rule strength.

Other significant contributions include the European Regional Democracy Map (Schakel & Verdoes, 2023), which systematizes data on various aspects of subnational governance within the EU-27, covering areas such as elections, electoral systems, and other institutional variables. More recently, Griffiths and Martinez (2021) focused on active secessionist movements across multiple countries, cataloging 72 such movements worldwide and coding factors related to their grievances, such as historic statehood loss, language or economic discrimination, lack of autonomy, and constitutional barriers. Finally, Elias et al. (2021) coded how regionalist actors frame their territorial demands based on qualitative content analysis of political documents from 61 regionalist parties and civil society actors across twelve European regions.

The dataset most similar to the one used in our study is the work by Sorens (2019), which captured votes for independentist, regionalist, and irredentist parties in 14 countries from 1947 to 2018, encompassing 1,616 country-region-election observations. This dataset also uses vote shares as the primary indicator of political support, focusing on 10 EU countries (including the UK) and four other OECD countries where territorial demands have been consistently present over time.

Unlike Sorens (2019), however, our study explicitly includes countries and regions where territorial demands are weak or absent. To achieve this, our dataset spans the entire EU-27 area plus the UK, providing a broader range of territorial demands, from the strongest to the weakest or non-existent claims, while also incorporating cases that have been understudied or where no territorial demands exist. This approach also allows us to incorporate understudied cases.

We code regionalist and secessionist parties regardless of their electoral strength, thus enriching the analysis of territorial politics and avoiding the selection bias often associated with case selection based on the dependent variable. By including all regions, not just those with active territorial claims, we can empirically distinguish between regions with and without demands, classify the intensity and type of demands (regionalist vs. secessionist), and examine their relationships with regional socioeconomic indicators, institutional characteristics, and public opinion variables.

## 2.2. *Finding a Typology of Territorial Demands*

The literature on territorial politics has often focused only on self-determination understood as an external option and not an internal one. For instance, Sambanis et al. (2018, p. 660) offer one of the strongest efforts in expanding the number of cases including regionalism up to 464 movements, but the focus on self-determination movements (mostly secessionist) do not allow to explore under what circumstances some territories feature self-government demands while others do not.

Empirical studies focused on the electoral support to territorial demands usually distinguish between them using a scale of ‘radicalism’. Sorens (2005), working on territorial demands as secessionism, distinguishes ‘moderate’ from ‘radical’ secessionists in his research design. When arguing on regionalism introduces an interesting distinction: ‘Regionalist parties are organized to defend regional interests and traditions, but this defense often takes the form of closer integration with the center. The goal of many regionalist parties is to capture more resources from the center rather than to become more autonomous of the center. Thus, whereas ethnic identity presumably affects the formation of regionalist parties just like the formation of secessionist parties, variables relating to viability and fiscal balance do not necessarily have anything to do with support for mere regionalism.’ (2005, p. 315). In a later work, Sorens (2008) described regionalism, secessionism and irredentism as three varieties of minority nationalism and only counted regionalist parties as such if they had a territorial agenda and refused independence.

From a different perspective, Álvarez Pereira et al. conceive autonomism and secessionism as two forms of regionalism, defined as a ‘process of agitation’ that can take this two broad expressions and include irredentism as a subcategory of secessionism ‘regionalism embeds both autonomism and secessionism, with the latter being a more radical form of regionalism and the former a milder form’ (2018, p. 2). Massetti and Schakel follow a similar idea by coding regionalism in two levels of ideological radicalism as moderate

(autonomist) and radical (secessionist) (2013, p. 798). They follow Dandoy's typology although in this case the author included two types of regionalism as 'protectionist' and 'decentralist' (2010, p. 206). Finally, Brancati in a study on the effects of economic integration focused exclusively on 'separatist' parties defined as 'those that demand the complete independence of a subnational territory of a state from that state' including those that formulate irredentist demands in the dataset (2014, p. 76).

The typologies discussed earlier are useful within their specific contexts. However, when developing our dataset coding scheme, we propose that differences in political objectives may stem from varying influences on the factors driving territorial demands. Specifically, we depart from a pluralist approach that assumes territorial demands are not a mere continuous variable but that groups seeking full independence for their political community may be motivated by different factors than those advocating for changes in administrative status within an existing state. Additionally, not all territorial demands are linked to minority nationalism as many coding decisions in the above mentioned datasets seem to imply. National identity is not always a driving force; economic or functional reasons alone can justify territorial claims. For instance, the *Partido Riojano* (Spain) advocates for territorial demands in La Rioja autonomous community without attaching a national identity to it.

Therefore, in our dataset we mainly focus on two dimensions. First, we introduce all regions as a potential way to avoid selection bias. This allows us to measure *occurrence* in the first place, that is the existence or not of territorial demands. Second, we proceed to categorise demands according to their nature. We follow here the common distinction between internal and external demands. Internal self-determination demands are coded as regionalist; while external self-determination demands are coded as *secessionist* (even when the ultimate goal is irredentist).

### 3. Method

We develop a comprehensive dataset that covers 374 regions from the twenty-seven European Union member states, as well as the United Kingdom. The dataset is based on the European Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics (NUTS) classification system, which divides most countries into three hierarchical administrative levels, ranging from local subdivisions to broader socio-economic regions. For each EU member state, we have inductively chosen the most appropriate NUTS level to best capture territorial demands. For instance, in Germany, we have selected the länder (NUTS-1) as the unit of observation, as regional demands are primarily concentrated at this level. In Spain, we opted for the Comunidades Autónomas (NUTS-2), while in Croatia, the lowest administrative level (NUTS-3) was chosen as the unit of observation (see Appendix A1 for an overview of the selected NUTS levels by country).

The primary focus of our study is the level of support for regionalist and secessionist demands. To measure this variable across the selected NUTS regions, we calculated the vote share for each party based on official election results in each region. For the sake of consistency and simplicity, we treated each party as a single entity, as disaggregating by faction would have introduced considerable ambiguity when calculating vote shares. Accordingly, we imputed the total vote share obtained by each party in the most recent regional election.

Using vote shares as a proxy for territorial demands is a widely accepted and standardized approach in the literature (Elias et al., 2021; Sorens, 2005; Sorens, 2012). This method can be applied across any election and at various levels of government, providing

a consistent and comparable measure of the political legitimacy or support for regionalist and secessionist agendas within specific constituencies.

We refer to *occurrence* of territorial demands when regions (NUTS) score above 0 in our vote share variables. When we refer to the *intensity* of territorial demands, we focus on electoral success (that is, the level of support a party advocating these demands receives) rather than the character of the demands themselves. This distinction is essential because a party with a modest vote share could still advocate for a very radical territorial agenda, or it might emphasize territorial issues more heavily than other policy areas, such as the left-right ideological spectrum. Conversely, a larger mainstream party may push for more moderate territorial demands, giving relatively more weight to other issues.<sup>1</sup>

The criteria for including cases of territorial demands are drawn from the literature reviewed in the previous section, particularly from Sambanis et al. (2018). Specifically, a candidacy qualifies as a territorial demand if it meets the following conditions:

- (a) It is registered for regional elections in the relevant NUTS territory and receives votes.
- (b) It explicitly makes claims in its party manifesto concerning the political power of the territorial unit.

Both conditions are necessary and jointly sufficient to meet the criteria. The rationale behind this inclusion/exclusion rule is that the mere presence of a regional party (or a regional branch of a state-wide party) is not sufficient to establish the existence of a territorial demand. There must be a clear claim related to the transfer of political power to the region. Furthermore, the party must participate in an electoral process, demonstrating an active pursuit of the effective electoral legitimacy for this claim.

Next, we established two mutually exclusive categories of territorial demands: regionalism (internal self-determination) and secessionism (external self-determination). To determine whether a political party falls into one category or the other, we build on the idea that regionalism does not challenge the state's constitutional structure but instead calls for greater powers within the existing territorial model as an internal form of accommodation within the parent state. In contrast, secessionism does challenge the territorial model by appealing to external self-determination. We used the following operational definitions:

- *Regionalism* (internal self-determination): A candidacy that includes any form of territorial demand related to self-government institutions and policies that does not alter the territorial model as such.
- *Secessionism* (external self-determination): A candidacy that includes any form of territorial demand related to self-government, which involves the possibility of forming a new independent state (sovereign or associated, confederal).

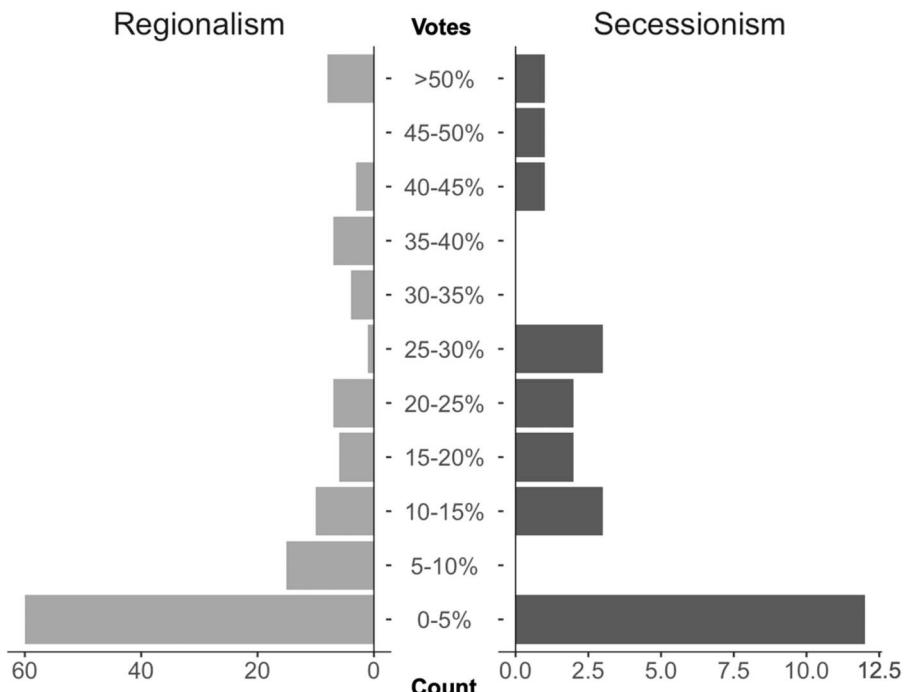
The classification of parties followed a two-stage procedure. In the first stage, we drew on established academic conventions in the field of territorial politics, where we have subject-matter expertise. This was complemented by informal consultation with other scholars specialized in the study of regionalism and supported by prior datasets (Elias et al., 2021; Sambanis et al., 2018; Sorens, 2019). This process allowed us to classify approximately 85–90% of the parties included in the dataset. Given the strong scholarly consensus around many prominent cases, we found this approach to be both efficient and reliable. For example, it is unambiguous that *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* in Spain campaigns

on a secessionist platform, while the *Partido Regionalista de Cantabria* promotes a regionalist agenda.

In the second stage, we closely examined all remaining ambiguous cases. This involved analyzing explicit statements in party manifestos, primarily through the MARPOR dataset (Volkens et al., 2019). Where manifestos were missing or unclear, we consulted additional secondary sources, including party websites, public statements by party leaders, media reports, and relevant academic literature.

Once the parties were classified into mutually exclusive categories (regionalist or secessionist) we aggregated separately their vote shares at the regional level. As a result, each region in the dataset may include regionalist parties, secessionist parties, both, or neither. For example, in the Basque Country, regionalist parties account for 39.1% of the vote, while secessionist parties account for 27.9%. In contrast, the Czech region of Olomouc has 0.75% support for regionalist parties and no active secessionist parties, whereas Wales registers 20.3% support for secessionist parties and no regionalist representation (Further details on the party classifications are provided in the Appendix A2).

The results of this categorization are presented in Figure 1. Among the 28 countries analysed, 15 exhibit territorial demands. And out of the 374 regions in the dataset, 128 show territorial demands, with 121 corresponding to regionalist demands and 25 to secessionist demands. This means that some regions are represented by both regionalist and secessionist parties. However, the voting patterns between the two groups differ significantly. For regionalism, the majority of parties receive relatively lower levels of support, with most falling in the 0-5% and 5-10% ranges. In contrast, secessionist demands tend to concentrate



**Figure 1.** Number of regions by type of territorial demand and vote share

around the 0-5% range, although there are some regions where secessionist parties garner more substantial support, particularly in the 5-10% range.

In Figure 2, we display the vote shares obtained by regionalist and secessionist parties across all regions in the dataset. Each point represents the vote shares in a given region, distinguishing between regionalist (grey points) and secessionist (black points) parties. The graph highlights the substantial variation in support levels across regions and party types. While many regions show relatively low vote shares for these parties, certain territories (such as Catalonia, Scotland, and Wales) stand out for their high levels of support, particularly for secessionist parties.

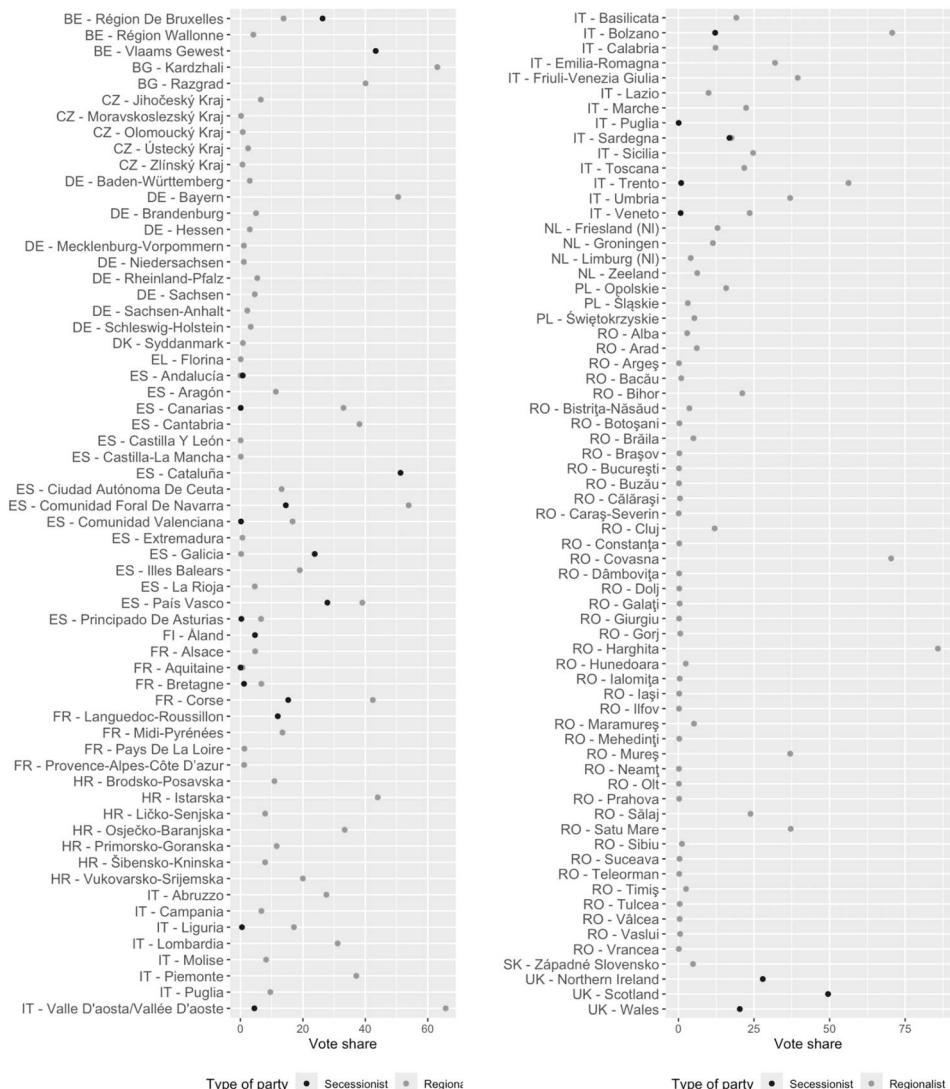


Figure 2. Regionalist and secessionist vote share in the regions with territorial demands

#### 4. Notes on Potential Uses

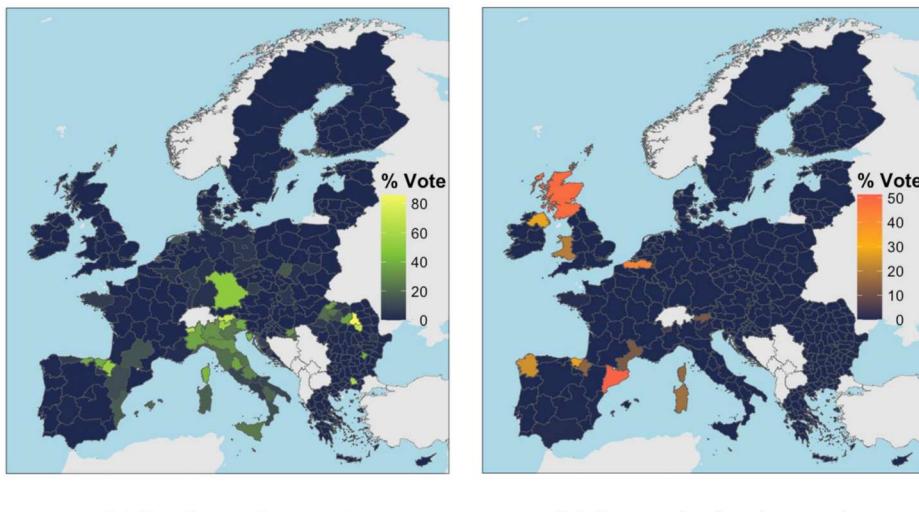
##### 4.1. Visualization

With the territorial variables in hand, we can now map and visualize the geographic distribution of these demands across European regions. Both maps are presented in [Figure 3](#).<sup>2</sup> In the map on the left, the green shades represent regionalist demands, highlighting regions with varying levels of support for regional autonomy and self-government. On the right, the secessionist variable is displayed in orange, focusing on regions where demands for full independence or the formation of new states are more prominent.

In the regionalism map ([Figure 3](#) (a)), the regions with the highest support for regionalist demands are predominantly concentrated in southern and western Europe, with notable areas of high support in Spain, France, and parts of Italy. These regions exhibit strong regional identities and calls for greater autonomy within their existing state frameworks. On the other hand, the second map ([Figure 3](#) (b)) reveals stronger support for secessionist movements in certain regions, particularly in parts of the United Kingdom, Spain, and Eastern Europe. The contrast between the two maps highlights the geographic diversity in territorial demands across the European territory.

##### 4.2. Correlates of Territorial Demands

Literature in territorial politics has linked territorial demands with a wide range of factors, including geographical, economic, and attitudinal aspects ([Álvarez Pereira et al., 2018](#); [Dalle Mule, 2017](#); [Galais & Serrano, 2020](#)). The dataset presented in this paper compiles available EU regional-level data from various official sources. It includes geographic, demographic, and economic variables from Eurostat, including regional population, density, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, and distance to the state capital.



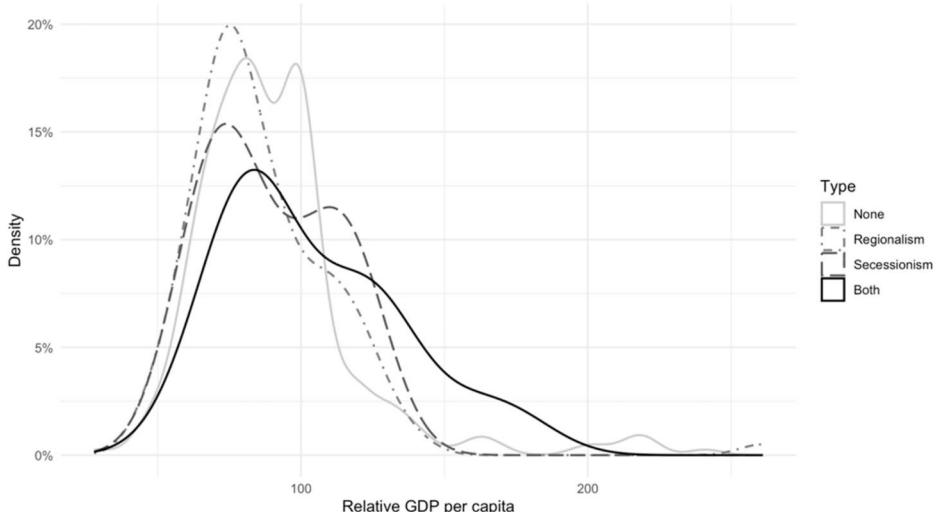
**Figure 3.** Regionalism and secessionism in the EU-28

Additionally, the dataset incorporates the Regional Innovation Scoreboard, which assesses the innovation performance of European regions.

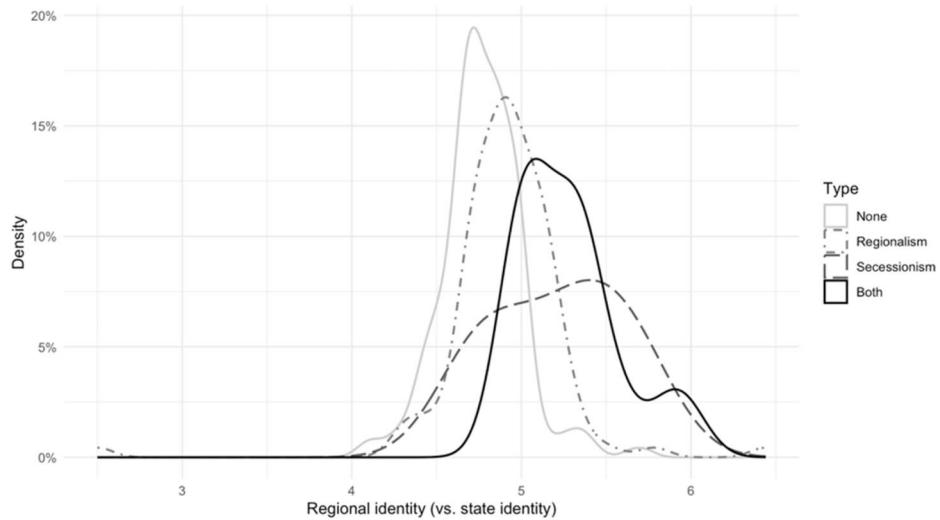
One of the key debates in the literature has been the so-called ‘nationalism of the rich’, the idea that secessionism is positively correlated with wealth and economic opportunities (Dalle Mulle, 2017; Piketty, 2020). Using our measurement of regionalist and secessionist demands across EU regions, we can examine this argument by analyzing the relative wealth of each region. Relative wealth is calculated by dividing a region’s GDP per capita by the state’s average GDP per capita. In this metric, a value of 100 represents the national average: values above 100 indicate that a region is wealthier than the state average, while values below 100 indicate lower relative wealth.

[Figure 4](#) illustrates the distribution of this variable across the four types of regions, illustrated with different shades of grey. The graph reveals a similar pattern in the lower and middle ranges of the distribution, with regions displaying comparable wealth levels. However, regions with both regionalist and secessionist demands are generally wealthier than other regions, particularly in the middle wealth brackets. Interestingly, the wealthiest regions in Europe do not exhibit territorial demands, suggesting that high levels of economic prosperity do not necessarily correlate with the presence of regionalist or secessionist movements.

Another factor associated with territorial demands is the strength of regional identity (Álvarez Pereira et al., 2018; Sorens, 2005; 2008). To capture this, we constructed a variable using data from the European Quality of Government (Charron et al., 2020). The variable measures the sense of regional identity and distinctiveness based on two attitudinal items: the level of attachment to the region and the level of attachment to the state. We calculated the difference between regional and state attachment scores and then computed the mean at the regional level. In [Figure 5](#), we present the distribution of this variable in regions with and without territorial demands. Lower values indicate greater attachment to the state, while higher values suggest stronger attachment to the region.



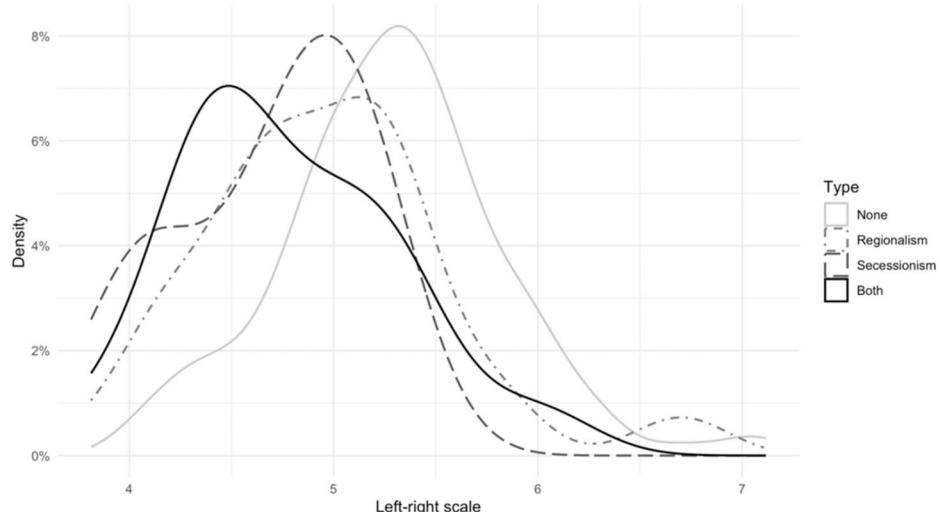
**Figure 4.** Distribution of relative GDP per capita in EU regions



**Figure 5.** Distribution of attachment to the region vs. state in EU regions

As expected, regions without territorial demands exhibit lower attachment to the region. Regions with regionalist demands show higher regional attachment, followed by regions with both regionalist and secessionist demands. Finally, regions with secessionist movements show the strongest attachment to the region, in contrast to their attachment to the state.

Another important attitudinal factor in the debates on territorial politics is the positioning of regionalist and secessionist movements in the left-right scale. Territorial demands often correlate with ideological positioning, with left-wing regions showing more support for self-determination demands (Galais & Serrano, 2020). [Figure 6](#) illustrates



**Figure 6.** Distribution of political ideologies (left-right scale) across EU regions

the distribution of this variable across regions, where lower values represent regions with a mean tilt to the left, and higher values show regions leaning to the right. As expected, regions without territorial demands tend to lean rightward, while regions with regionalist demands show a more central alignment. Regions with both regionalist and secessionist demands exhibit a stronger leftward orientation. Notably, secessionist movements are most prevalent in the regions with the strongest left-wing positioning.

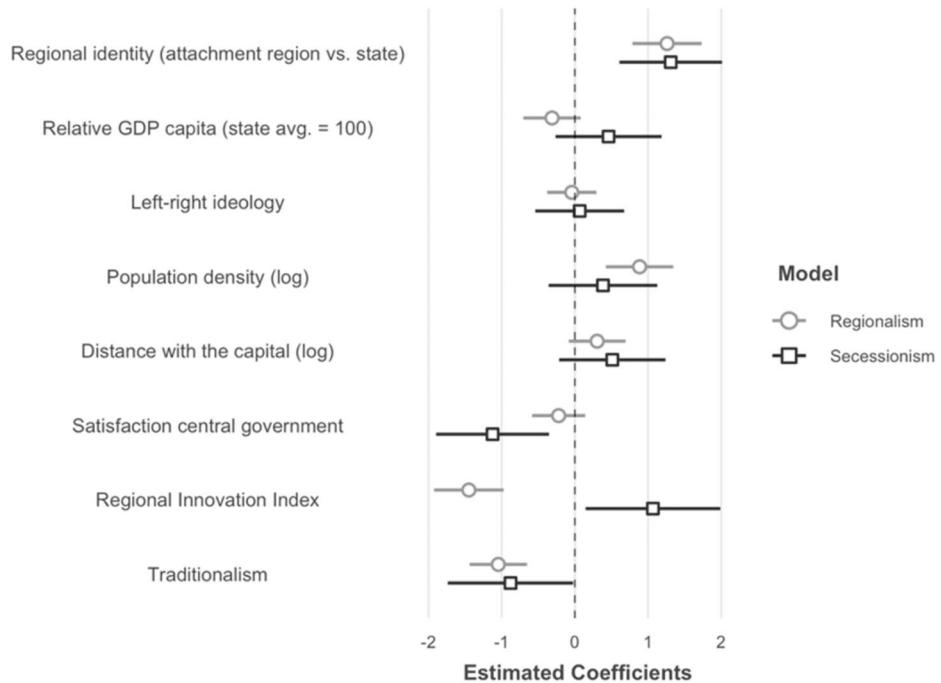
The dataset also includes various attitudinal variables, such as the level of tolerance towards same-sex marriage and the degree of attachment to national traditions. These variables derived from sources such as the European Social Survey (ESS8 v2.1), the EU Regional Dataset (v2021) from the European Quality of Government Institute, and the Eurobarometer (ZA7601\_v1). Individual-level attitudes have been aggregated to the regional NUTS level by calculating regional averages. Additionally, the dataset incorporates institutional variables, including the shared-rule indicators from the Regional Authority Index (RAI) dataset (Hooghe et al., 2016; Shair-Rosenfield et al., 2021) (see the codebook in Appendix A3 for the full description of the variables).

#### *4.3. Engaging with the Literature*

The study of territorial movements has garnered growing interest among scholars, yet there remains a gap between empirical methodologies and theories of nationalism (Smith, 1991). Territorial demands often emerge from perceived political distinctiveness, that is when a group and its territory diverge significantly from the broader state. The literature debates what forms of distinctiveness provoke such claims, drawing on theories ranging from ethnic identity (Berghe, 1987; Geertz, 1973) and instrumentalism (Hechter et al. 1982), to modernization (Anderson, 2006; Deutsch, 1953; Gellner, 2008; Hobsbawm, 2021), internal colonialism (Hechter 1992), and elite-driven ideologies (Breuilly, 1994; Giddens, 1987; Hroch, 1985). While many studies continue to frame movements in terms of identity versus interest, newer research calls for a more integrated understanding and our dataset is built to expand the research agenda from this perspective.

Grievances remain central to explaining secessionist demands, encompassing cultural repression, political exclusion, and unmet economic expectations (Griffiths & Martinez, 2021; Kartsonaki, 2020). Economic motives show mixed results, with some studies suggesting wealthier regions are more likely to seek independence (Dalle Mulle, 2017; Piketty, 2020), while others highlight risk aversion (Hierro & Queralt, 2020; Zuber & Szöcik, 2015). Geography, emotion, and symbolism (such as peripherality, natural resources, and affective dynamics) also play important roles (Balcells et al., 2020; Dion, 1996; Sorens, 2012). Institutional and historical contexts further shape outcomes, especially in post-colonial settings where legacy institutions, or their absence, can explain variation in mobilization (Griffiths & Muro, 2020; Roeder, 2007; Siroky & Cuffe, 2015). Moreover, contemporary movements often align with progressive ideological frameworks, emphasizing future-oriented narratives over purely cultural claims (Dalle Mulle & Serrano, 2019; Elias et al., 2021; Galais & Serrano, 2020).

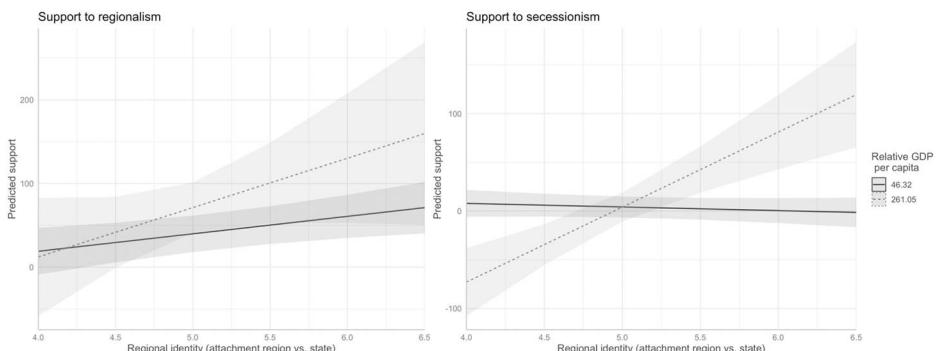
The dataset presented in this article might be useful for several purposes. One potential use is the analysis of the role of identity and relative wealth in explaining regionalist and secessionist demands. Through regression models including interactions we test the role of these factors when they interact with each other. For example, through simple multiple regression analysis our findings are twofold (See [Figure 7](#) and Appendix A4). First,



**Figure 7.** Estimated coefficients of multiple regression model (more details of the model can be found in Appendix A4)

while controlling by other variables, the interaction between identity and wealth does have a positive association with secessionist vote, while it does not show any relationship with the regionalist vote. Second, this effect has some nuances when dividing between regions at the lowest and at the top part of the GDP per capita scale as we show in [Figure 8](#).

Regional identity only has a positive interaction with the relative wealth of the region among relatively richer regions while it does not have any effects among poorer



**Figure 8.** Predicted values of the relative wealth and attachment interactions (more details of the model can be found in Appendix A5)

regions. These differences do not seem to be present in the case of regionalist supports since regional attachment always has a positive effect on these electoral supports, yet they are not statistically significant in the overall model. Finally, we performed a similar analysis regarding the interaction between ideology and identity and ideology and wealth. While the former does not seem to have any effect on the intensity of territorial demands the latter does. Regional attachment has a strong positive effect on independence supports in more leftist regions, while in more right-wing regions regional attachment is strongly correlated with regionalist supports.

These observations coincide with previous literature on the importance of regional attachment, and therefore distinctiveness, as a determinant of territorial demands (Álvarez Pereira et al., 2018; Sambanis et al., 2018; Sorens, 2005; 2008). In fact, in both cases of territorial demand, regionalism and secessionism, regional attachment is by far the strongest predictor of both occurrence and intensity. Therefore, there is an important commonality between types of territorial demands, subjective regional attachment is a common feature that makes them part of a family of political phenomenon structured around a territorial cleavage as point out by the classic literature on this topic (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). However, the effects of the regional attachment variables are inverse in explaining occurrence and intensity, while in the former is more strongly associated with secessionist occurrence, in the latter explains the intensity of regionalism by far. These findings seem to point to the complexity of distinctiveness and, beyond its mere operationalization in an intensity scale, the different meaning that regional attachment might have ranging from a sub-national identity to a localist identification without national attributes. This finding is supported by recent literature pointing to secessionism and/or regionalism as not directly related to identity but mediated by other factors that make it flexible and subjective (Basta, 2018; Guinjoan, 2022; Serrano, 2013).

A glimpse to the models suggests that, contrary to previous literature (Álvarez Pereira et al., 2018; Sorens, 2012), we do not observe economy being a strong predictor of territorial demands as such. Therefore, there is no general evidence of a ‘nationalism of the rich’ (Dalle Mulle, 2017) affecting all territorial demands but, again, a more nuanced and multifactorial effect. After all, our dataset might be used to affirm that Smith (1991) and Connor (2018) were perhaps right, the economic dimension has been largely overstated in the literature. According to the regression model, relative wealth is not a statistically significant predictor of any type of territorial demand, whereas the degree of innovation of the regional economy seems to have a slightly negative impact. This could be an indirect measure of economic peripherality or dependence that reminds the ‘internal colonialism’ thesis (Hechter, 1992). However, when it comes to the intensity of the demands there is a timid plot twist and relative wealth appears to be a low intensity predictor of regionalism but not secessionism.

Beyond these findings, by using the dataset we can observe very relevant issues regarding some additional factors included in it. For example, dissatisfaction with central government has a direct relationship with secessionism, this supports previous literature on the role of emotions and constructed political alternatives (Basta, 2018; Dion, 1996). However, it does not seem to appear as a relevant variable to explain regionalism occurrence and intensity, this suggests that regionalists might show supports in a certain territory and, at the same time, coexisting with average levels of central government satisfaction.

On the contrary, ideology does have an important explanatory potential. The absence of territorial demands is statistically predicted by a more rightist orientation of the population

in a given region and traditionalist values have a positive effect on the occurrence of regionalism, whereas more traditionalist orientations are correlated with less intensity of secessionist demands. These findings offer a more encompassing view than what some theories of nationalism seem to assume and are consistent with the recent research on the overlapping between ideology and territorial demands. The idea of independence as ‘means for a better future’ (Elias et al., 2021) compared to greed and ethnic theories of secessionism (Horowitz, 1985) appears more plausibly related to the findings in our models.

This is also consistent with explaining the origins and support to secessionism as a product of institutional and political factors rather than predetermined ethnic identities or identity manipulations from the political elites. Recent literature has developed a more nuanced view on the specific framing used by secessionist parties and their use of national identity also depending on their strength and time in office (Ferreira, 2022). Regionalism seems to be more diverse and perhaps would require a more nuanced analysis. A potential explanation of this diversity of determinants is that regionalism is not a single phenomenon, our dataset includes very different regional parties that formulate all kinds of demands. Moreover, regionalism might be more dependent on the political offer and the degree of nationalization of party systems among other factors. Beyond, economic and identity factors, the only thing in common that all these movements seem to have is a strong effect of institutions.

Our dataset exploration suggests that relatively higher shared-rule degrees are a good predictor of less regionalist vote intensity but of more regionalist occurrence and of absence of territorial demands, whereas the effects on secessionist occurrence and/or intensity are not statistically significant.

Therefore, we do not find any evidence of higher regional authority predicting more territorial demands. These findings are consistent with Sorens’ (2004, 2005) works, levels of regional autonomy *per se* does not seem to be a predictor of secessionism (although in this case we use shared-rule). The negative correlation between regional authority and regionalist vote intensity but not with secessionist intensity can be explained by regionalists aiming to ‘catch-up’ other autonomy leverage levels, as for example in the Spanish territorial dynamics of autonomy increases based on territorial competition (Hombrado, 2011). On the other hand, the absence of association between regional authority and secessionism reinforces the thesis of a relatively different political phenomenon from regionalist demands involving more societal projects (Dalle Mulle & Serrano, 2019; Elias et al., 2021; Galais & Serrano, 2020) rather than changes within the existing territorial model.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The dataset presented in this article offers a comprehensive electoral mapping of territorial demands in EU regions, facilitating the empirical analysis of regionalist and secessionist movements from a variety of perspectives. By systematically compiling electoral results of non-state-wide parties from 2010 to 2022, it enables researchers to visualize, explore patterns and examine explanatory factors of territorial claims. The inclusion of multiple variables (such as identity, wealth, institutional arrangements, and ideology) provides a robust foundation for comparative studies in territorial politics. Furthermore, the dataset allows for the assessment of both the occurrence and intensity of these demands, ensuring a nuanced understanding of their determinants across different regions.

Ultimately, the dataset serves as a valuable tool for future research, enabling scholars to refine theories on territorial politics and multilevel governance in the EU. By providing a

detailed empirical basis for studying regionalism and secessionism, it opens avenues for further investigation into the dynamic interactions between institutional frameworks, identity politics, and electoral behaviour. The findings underscore the need for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate political science, economics, and sociology to fully grasp the evolving landscape of territorial demands in the EU.

### **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### **Supplemental data**

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2025.2532317>.

### **Notes**

1. That said, we recognize that using vote share data to measure intensity has its limitations. Vote shares may not fully capture the scope of territorial demands, as they represent a party's overall electoral support across various policy domains, such as left-right ideologies, social issues, and more. Thus, territorial demands may only partially influence the vote share, as these parties also focus on other policies. Despite these limitations, vote share data offers distinct advantages over other approaches. In the European context, some survey-based data (e.g., QoG, ESS, Eurobarometer) include questions disaggregated at the regional NUTS level regarding a sense of regional belonging. However, these surveys primarily focus on feelings of attachment to a region or national identity and do not directly measure policy support for territorial demands. An individual's attachment to a particular territory or national identity does not necessarily translate into support for the political agenda of a regionalist or secessionist party. Another advantage of using vote share data over survey data is its spatial and temporal availability. Regional-level surveys are often not consistently available across all regions, and even when they are, their coverage can be limited to specific periods or geographic areas. For instance, Europe-wide survey data has only become more widespread in recent years, and even then, certain countries may be excluded. A notable example of this is the exclusion of the UK from many surveys, such as Eurobarometer, following Brexit.
2. Overseas territories of EU member states are included in the dataset, but are not displayed on the map for the sake of visual clarity.

### **Notes on contributors**

**Jordi Mas** is an Assistant Professor of the Department of Law and Politics at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. He is a member of the Research Group GADE, focused on Governance and Democracy. He specializes in Governance Indicators, Regionalism and Political Institutions.

**Marc Sanjaume-Calvet** is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona) and a Member of the Social and Political Theory Research group (SPTG). He specializes in Federalism, Self-determination, Territorial Conflicts and Movernance in Multi-level States.

**Ivan Serrano** is an Associate Professor of the Department of Law and Politics at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. He is a member of TURBA-Lab, an interdisciplinary

research group focused on global change. He specializes in Political Theory and Territorial Politics.

## ORCID

Jordi Mas  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6660-4593>

Marc Sanjaume-Calvet  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8723-1618>

Ivan Serrano  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9781-3096>

## References

- Álvarez Pereira, B., Portos, M., & Vourdas, J. (2018). Waving goodbye? The determinants of autonomism and secessionism in Western Europe. *Regional Studies*, 52(2), 197–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2017.1282609>
- Anderson, Benedict. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Revised edition. Verso Books.
- Balcells, Laia, José Fernández-Albertos, & Alexander Kuo. (2020). Secession and social polarization. *Econstor Working Paper*. November. <https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2021/936-5>.
- Basta, K. (2018). The state between minority and majority nationalism: Decentralization, symbolic recognition, and secessionist crises in Spain and Canada. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 48(1), 51–75. <https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjx048>
- Berghe, Pierre L. Van den. (1987). *The ethnic phenomenon*. ABC-CLIO.
- Brancati, D. (2006). Decentralization: Fueling the fire or dampening the flames of ethnic conflict and secessionism? *International Organization*, 60(3), 651–685. doi:10.1017/S002081830606019X
- Brancati, D. (2014). Another great illusion: The advancement of separatism through economic integration. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 2(1), 69–95. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2013.30>
- Breuilly, John. (1994). *Nationalism and the state*. 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press.
- Castellà, J. M. (2018). Constitution and referendum on secession in Catalonia. In A. López-Basaguren, & L. E. San Epifanio (Eds.), *Claims for secession and federalism: A comparative study with a special focus on Spain* (pp. 405–421). Springer.
- Cetrà, D., & Harvey, M. (2018). Explaining accommodation and resistance to demands for independence referendums in the UK and Spain. *Nations and Nationalism*, 25(2), 607–629. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12417>
- Charron, N., Dahlberg, S., Sundström, A., Holmberg, S., Rothstein, B., Alvarado Pachon, N., & Dalli, C. M. (2020). *The quality of government: EU regional dataset, version Nov20*. University of Gothenburg: The Quality of Government Institute.
- Connor, W. (2018). *Ethnonationalism: The quest for understanding*. Princeton University Press.
- Dalle Mulle, E. (2017). *The nationalism of the rich: Discourses and strategies of separatist parties in catalonia, flanders, northern Italy and Scotland*. Routledge.
- Dalle Mulle, E., & Serrano, I. (2019). Between a principled and a consequentialist logic: Theory and practice of secession in catalonia and Scotland. *Nations and Nationalism*, 25(2), 630–651. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12412>
- Dandoy, R. (2010). Ethno-Regionalist parties in Europe: A typology. *Perspectives on Federalism*, 2(2), 4.
- Dardanelli, P., Kincaid, J., Fenna, A., Kaiser, A., Lecours, A., & Singh, A. K. (2019). Conceptualizing, measuring, and theorizing dynamic De/centralization in federations. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 49(1), 1–29. doi:10.1093/publius/pjy036
- Della Porta, D., & Portos, M. (2021). A bourgeois story? The class basis of Catalan independentism. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 9(3), 391–411. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2020.1737208>
- Deutsch, Karl W. (1953). *Nationalism and social communication: An inquiry into the foundations of nationality*. 2nd ed. MIT Press.
- Dion, S. (1996). Why is secession difficult in well-established democracies? Lessons from Quebec. *British Journal of Political Science*, 26(2), 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400000466>
- Elias, A., Basile, L., Franco-Guillén, N., & Szőcsik, E. (2021). The framing territorial demands (FraTerr) dataset: A novel approach to conceptualizing and measuring regionalist actors' territorial strategies. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 33(3), 355–370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2021.1964481>

- Fazi, André. (2013). The Western Mediterranean islands and the many faces of independentism. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 50 (4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2012.729731>
- Ferreira, C. (2022). Identity, money, or governance? Explaining secessionist parties' rhetorical strategies. *Party Politics*, 30(1), 179–189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688221140249>
- Galais, C., & Serrano, I. (2020). The effects of regional attachment on ideological self-placement: A comparative approach. *Comparative European Politics*, 18(4), 487–509. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-019-00196-z>
- Geertz, Clifford. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. Basic Books.
- Gellner, Ernest. (2008). *Nations and nationalism*. Cornell University Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. (1987). *The nation-state and violence: volume 2 of a contemporary critique of historical materialism*. Polity Press
- Griffiths, R. (2016). *Age of secession*. Cambridge University Press.
- Griffiths, R., & Martinez, A. (2021). Local conditions and the demand for independence: A dataset of secessionist grievances. *Nations and Nationalism*, 27(2), 580–590. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12667>
- Griffiths, R. D., and Muro, D. (eds.) (2020). *Strategies of secession and counter-secession*. ECPR Press.
- Guinjoan, M. (2022). Who backs separation? An empirical assessment of the objective and subjective markers of identity in support for secession in catalonia. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 52(2), 329–350. <https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjab027>
- Hechter, Michael. (1992). The dynamics of secession. *Acta Sociologica*, 35 (4), 267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000169939203500401>.
- Hechter, Michael, Debra Friedman, & Malka Appelbaum. (1982). A theory of ethnic collective action. *International Migration Review*, 16 (2): 412–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019791838201600207>.
- Hierro, María Jose, & Didac Queralt. (2020). The divide over independence: explaining preferences for secession in an advanced open economy. *American Journal of Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12549>.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. (2021). *On nationalism*. Little, Brown Book Group.
- Hombrado, A. (2011). Learning to catch the wave? Regional demands for constitutional change in contexts of asymmetrical arrangements. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 21(4–5), 479–501. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2011.578943>
- Hooghe, L., Marks, G., Schakel, A. H., Chapman-Osterkatz, S., Niedzwiecki, S., & Shair-Rosenfield, S. (2016). *Measuring regional authority. Volume I. A postfunctionalist theory of governance*. Oxford University Press.
- Horowitz, D. L. (1985). *Ethnic groups in conflict*. University of California Press.
- Hroch, Miroslav. (1985). *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe: a comparative analysis of the social composition of patriotic groups among the smaller European nations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jordana, J., Holesch, A., Keating, M., Marx, A., & Wouters, J. (2019). Self-Determination and the reconfiguration of the nation-state in Europe. In *Changing borders in Europe*. Routledge.
- Jordana, J., Keating, M., Marx, A., & Wouters, J. (2018). *Changing borders in Europe: Exploring the dynamics of integration, differentiation and self-determination in the European union*. Routledge.
- Kartsonaki, Argyro. (2020). The false hope of remedial secession: theory, law, and reality. In Ryan Griffiths & Diego Muro (Eds), *Strategies of secession and counter-secession*. Rowman and Littlefield International/ECPR Press.
- Keating, M. (2017). *Debating Scotland: Issues of independence and union in the 2014 referendum*. Oxford University Press.
- Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (1967). *Party systems and voter alignments: Cross-national perspectives*. Free Press.
- López, J., & Sanjaume-Calvet, M. (2020). The political use of de facto referendums of independence. The case of catalonia. *Representation. Journal of Representative Democracy*, 56(4), 501–519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2020.1720790>
- Massetti, E., & Schakel, A. H. (2013). Ideology matters: Why decentralisation has a differentiated effect on regionalist parties' fortunes in western democracies. *European Journal of Political Research*, 52(6), 797–821. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12015>
- Piketty, T. (2020). *Capital and ideology*. Harvard University Press.
- Roeder, P. G. (2007). *Where nation-states come from: Institutional change in the age of nationalism*. Princeton University Press.
- Requejo, F. (2005). *Multinational federalism and value pluralism. The Spanish case*. Routledge.
- Requejo, F., & Sanjaume-Calvet, M. (2019). Independence referendums. Catalonia in perspective. *Catalan Social Sciences Review*, 9, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.2436/cssr.v0i9.145988>
- Rodríguez-Teruel, J., & Barrio, A. (2021). The asymmetrical effect of polarization on support for independence: The case of catalonia. *Politics and Governance*, 9(4), 412–425. doi:10.17645/pag.v9i4.4627

- Sambanis, N., Germann, M., & Schädel, A. (2018). SDM: A new data set on self-determination movements with an application to the reputational theory of conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(3), 656–686. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002717735364>
- Sanjaume-Calvet, M. (2011). Case Study. 13: Basque. Secessionism: From bullets to ballots? In A. Pavković, & P. Radan (Eds.), *The ashgate research companion to secession* (pp. 511–513). Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Sanjaume-Calvet, M., Cetrà, D., & Franco-Guillén, N. (2023). Leaving Europe, leaving Spain: Comparing secessionism from and within the European union. *West European Politics*, 47(5), 1121–1149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2191104>
- Schakel, A. H., & Verdoes, A. (2023). Tracing developments in regional electoral democracy: The impact of regional authority, regional identity and regional electoral systems on the regional vote. In F. Teles (Ed.), *Handbook on local and regional governance* (pp. 162–181). Edward Elgar.
- Serrano, I. (2013). Just a matter of identity? Support for independence in catalonia. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 23(5), 523–545. doi:[10.1080/13597566.2013.775945](https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2013.775945)
- Shair-Rosenfield, S., Schakel, A. H., Niedzwiecki, S., Marks, G., Hooghe, L., & Chapman-Osterkatz, S. (2021). Language difference and regional authority. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 31(1), 73–97. doi:[10.1080/13597566.2020.1831476](https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2020.1831476)
- Siroky, D. S., & Cuffe, J. (2015). Lost autonomy, nationalism and separatism. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48 (1), 3–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013516927>
- Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity*. University of Nevada Press.
- Sorens, J. (2004). Globalization, secessionism, and autonomy. *Electoral Studies*, 23(23), 727–752. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2003.10.003>
- Sorens, J. (2005). The cross-sectional determinants of secessionism in advanced democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, 38(3), 304–326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414004272538>
- Sorens, J. (2008). Regionalists against secession: The political economy of territory in advanced democracies. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 14(3), 325–360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537110802289670>
- Sorens, J. (2012). *Secessionism: Identity, interest, and strategy*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Sorens, J. (2019). *Decentralization and regionalist party strength revisited*. Working paper, unpublished.
- Trinn, C., & Schulte, F. (2020). Untangling territorial self-governance—new typology and data. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 32(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2020.1795837>
- Volkens, A., Krause, W., Lehmann, P., Matthiess, T., Merz, N., Regel, S., & Wessels, B. (2019). *The Manifesto data collection*. Manifesto project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), Berlin.
- Zuber, Christina. I., & Szöcsik, Edina. (2015). Ethnic outbidding and nested competition: Explaining the extremism of ethnonational minority parties in Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 784–801. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12105>