

Hurtling Towards Nothing

Explaining the Escalation of the Contemporary Catalan Crisis

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Abstract

While Catalonia has been a part of a larger Spanish kingdom since well before the unification of Spain in the fifteenth century, there have been confrontations over the status of this relationship throughout their shared history. The central claims of the Catalan movement have shifted over time between nationalist, autonomist, federalist, and separatist, as has the relative strength and stability of Catalonia vis-a-vis Spain. Accordingly, the responses of the Spanish state to Catalan demands have varied considerably, from the brutal repression of Francisco Franco's regime to the willing devolution of powers to Barcelona during Spain's democratic transition. This paper will examine Spain's responses to recent confrontations with Catalan nationalism, with the aim of explaining the shifting demands of the current Catalan movement from pro autonomy in 2004 to a unilateral declaration of independence in 2017.

Acknowledgements

To my parents, who have no idea what I'm talking about but listen anyway;

To my friends, who have now heard a lot more about Catalonia than they ever wanted to and yet still agree to spend time with me;

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List of Abbreviations

Note: Foreign translations of organizational names are marked either Cat for Catalan or Es for Spanish.

- ANC - *Assemblea Nacional Catalana* (Cat); Catalan National Assembly; grassroots pro-independence group in Catalonia
- C's – *Ciudadanos* (Es); *Ciutadans* (Cat); Citizens, officially Party of the Citizenry; left-wing populist Spanish nationalist party
- CDC - *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (Cat); Democratic Convergence of Catalonia; centrist, social-democratic Catalan nationalist/autonomist party, formerly UDC's partner in CiU until CDC became pro-independence
- CEO - *Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió* (Cat); Centre for Opinion Studies; Catalan government office in charge of public opinion surveys. CEO was a part of the Catalan Economic Ministry until 2011, when it was transferred to the direct oversight of the *Generalitat*
- CiU - *Convergència i Unió* (Cat); Convergence and Union; Catalan nationalist coalition of CDC and UDC, split following CDC's shift to pro-independence.
- CpC – *Ciutadans pel Canvi* (Cat); Citizens for Change; center-left social-democratic Catalan regional party; allied with PSC-PSOE from their inception in 1999 to 2006. Disbanded in 2011.
- CUP – *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular* (Cat); Popular Unity Candidacy; grassroots movement instrumental in planning the municipal query process in 2009-11, first contested Catalan regional elections in 2012, but had a limited municipal presence beginning in 2003.
- ERC - *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Cat); Republican Left of Catalonia; primary Catalan independence party, leftwing nationalist, social-democratic party.
- EUiA - *Esquerra Unida i Alternativa* (Cat); United and Alternative Left; far-left socialist, ecologist, pro-self-determination Catalan regional party. Generally coalitions with ICV.
- ICV - *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* (Cat); Initiative for Catalonia Greens; eco-socialist green party, Catalan nationalists and regional party, generally runs with EUiA.
- JxCat – *Junts pel Catalunya* (Cat); Together for Catalonia; liberal Catalan independence party, regional party essentially composed of PDeCAT and independents.
- JxSi – *Junts pel Sí* (Cat); Together for Yes; pro-independence coalition which led the *Generalitat* from 2015 to 2017, following the “symbolic plebiscite” of the 2015 Catalan regional elections. Formed from the entire pro-independence bloc, with the exception of CUP, who are coalition-adverse.
- PDeCAT - *Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català* (Cat); Catalan European Democratic Party; successor to CDC, but also part of JxCat alongside CDC.

- PP – *Partido Popular* (Es); operates as *Partit Popular de Catalunya* (Cat) in Catalan regional elections, may be abbreviated PPC; Popular Party; Spanish unionist, center-right, Christian-democratic party, founded by members of the Franco regime following the transisiton to democracy, which is a continual source of friction with minority groups. Spain's primary right-wing party, opposite PSOE.
- PSC - *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* (Cat); Socialist Part of Catalonia; Catalan affiliate of PSOE (technically PSC-PSOE), pro-union socialist party.
- PSOE – *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Es); Socialist Workers' Party of Spain; center-left, pro-EU socialist party, established 1879 but banned under Franco; primary left party in Spanish politics, opposite PP.
- SI - *Solidaritat Catalana per la Independència* (Cat); Catalan Solidarity for Independence; grassroots social movement, helped CUP coordinate the municipal query process, formally entered Catalan regional politics in 2010 as a single-issue pro-independence party.
- UDC - *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya* (Cat); Democratic Union of Catalonia; Christian-democratic, center-right Catalan regionalist party. Allied with CDC as CiU for most of their history, largely unsuccessful since the split.

Introduction

On 27 October 2017, a crowd of thousands of *independentistas* gathered in front of the Palau del Parlament in Barcelona to listen live to the voting of their regional government inside. The resolution being considered was a momentous one; a unilateral declaration of Catalonia's independence from Spain. The very consideration of the question by the *Generalitat*, Catalonia's autonomous government, marked the culmination of over a decade of campaigning, including two regional referenda, hundreds of municipal public queries, and a massively-successful grassroots mobilization campaign by Catalanist activists. The resolution ultimately passed - though 53 of the 135 members of the Catalan parliament refused to be present after the *Generalitat's* legal counsel determined such a vote to be illegal under Spanish law. With nearly the entire opposition bench absent, the final result was 70 for and ten against, with two abstaining. Despite a legal requirement for such a serious measure to be approved by a two-thirds majority (90 seats), the *Generalitat* declared the vote binding. For a brief and shining moment, Catalonia was free from Spain.

While in many ways the events of October 2017 were unprecedented, they were also eerily reminiscent of past events; the speech that Carles Puigdemont (then President of the *Generalitat*) made to a packed crowd waving *estelades*, the starred flags of the independence movement, could have been mistaken for Lluís Companys addressing the Catalan people in October 1934. Separated by most of a century, the addresses evolved between Companys' declaration of a "Catalan State of the federal Spanish Republic"¹ and Puigdemont's declaration of an independent Catalan republic. In both cases, these unilateral redefinitions of Catalonia's

¹ Irla; original Catalan text: "l'ESTAT CATALÀ de la República Federal Espanyola" (emphasis from original text)

relationship to Spain were received poorly in Madrid. In fact, the 1 October referendum that had provided Puigdemont's government with a mandate to pursue independence had been met with a level of police violence that reminded many Catalans of the oppression they had faced during the consolidation of Generalissimo Francisco Franco's fascist regime in 1939-42.² After nearly a millennium as a part of first Aragon and then unified Spain, there is a historical analog to nearly every occurrence in Catalonia's relationship to the larger state. For the savvy Catalan political elite, this also means centuries of powerful heuristic images that can be invoked, in what Stuart Kaufman calls the "myth-symbol complex", defined in his 2001 book *Modern Hatreds* as "the combination of myths, memories, values, and symbols that defines not only who is a member of the group but what it means to be a member".³ In the Catalan case, where ethnicity itself is not a salient argument, the Catalan myth-symbol complex, along with the Catalan language itself, constitute almost the entirety of membership in the Catalan group.

Throughout the world, separatist claims are at the root of many long-running conflicts, and there is a well-developed literature on secessionist conflict. This thesis will contribute to the understanding of contemporary, non-violent minority mobilization, and more specifically the escalation of these movements. The speed with which the Catalanist movement has escalated their demands from increased autonomy within Spain (the dominant ideology of the *Generalitat* until the 2012 regional elections) to direct challenges on the issue of full independence in 2017 is alarming. In the whole of Catalonia's history there have been few moments where Catalonia has seemed this determined to leave Spain. The question that still haunts observers is what

² While Franco's regime lasted until after his death in November 1975, during their first three years in power the new government set out on an ambitious and brutal attempt at homogenizing Spain. Officials purged Catalan nationalists from virtually all state jobs, removed all traces of the Catalan language from public spaces, and banned Catalan cultural symbols and national holidays. Governance and education at all levels was recentralized under the guise of building a stronger nation, and the fledgling regime "proceeded in their campaign of annihilation of all vestiges of ethno-political identity...not simply to suffocate Catalanism but to eradicate Catalan culture and any sign of a separate Catalan identity at its very roots" (Conversi, 111-113). While the brutality of the regime waned over time, the centralization of Catalonia's previously autonomous institutions, as well as the ban on the Catalan language and all symbols of the Catalan nation, lasted as long as Franco's regime.

³ Kaufman, 25

accounts for this sudden escalation to conflict? After centuries of fighting back and forth with Spain over their status, why did Catalan elites mount their most serious drive for independence at a point in their history where they have near-full autonomy within Spain? It would be flippant to assert that the 2008 financial crisis, or the nagging wound of Catalan resentment, or the bicentennial of the Fall of Barcelona could single-handedly radicalize the region - or even that the combination of all three could do it. Instead, we will turn to the preexisting literature.

Literature Review

Due to the number and severity of existing separatist conflicts there is a wealth of literature on the subject. The case of Catalonia's precarious relationship with Madrid has been examined through many of these lenses already. However, with the unprecedented spike in pro-independence activity in Catalonia in the last several years, it appears to be time to reconsider a micro-level assessment of the Catalan conflict. However, the sourcing for this thesis was a little particular, given that separatism literature frequently resolves around the salience of ethnicity. There is virtually no one in positions to be heard in Catalonia or Spain arguing that there are ethnic differences between the peoples of the Iberian peninsula. While the identities that have formed are dense and cohesive, the Catalan identity specifically is wildly more accepting than ethnic groupings tend to be.

First, the prevailing economic theory of ethnic conflict comes from Donald Horowitz's *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, and is based in the relative economic development of a minority region and the larger state. This seems like a promising theoretical lens for the Catalan case, which frequently hinges on the economic outpacing of Spain by Catalonia and the associated anxieties in Catalonia of how Spain spends Catalan tax contributions. However, Horowitz's predictions for Catalonia⁴ as an advanced region in a [relatively] backwards state are not entirely borne out. By Horowitz's reckoning, advanced regions should be disinclined to leave a

⁴ Horowitz, 258

position of economic privilege within a weaker state to suffer the economic damage that independence is likely to deal them. At the same time, Catalonia's place as one of the wealthiest and most industrialized regions of Spain is presently a central reason for support of the independence campaign. One possible explanation for this deviation from the model could be the politicization of the issue of taxation in a way that has fused it into a identity issue; Catalans do not necessarily resent paying their fair share to support the poorer regions of Spain,⁵ but they do not trust the Spanish government to direct tax revenue responsibly, and resent what they view to be the most likely outcome - their money being spent on infrastructure projects in Madrid and are stolen by corrupt *Castellano* politicians. Indeed, the politicization of exogenous issues - and ensuing essentialization as an aspect of the Catalan identity - complicates the Catalan case dramatically. Many issues, like taxation, have taken on symbolic importance and moral values that they lack on their face, supporting Kaufman's findings that "people [make choices] by responding to the most emotionally potent symbol evoked".⁶ In most cases, the emotional response to framing the tax debate as an issue of *Castellano* corruption and cronyism is much stronger than the rational response a person is likely to feel from economic arguments about the relative weight of the *comunidades*' tax contributions. However, while Kaufman's theory of symbolic politics helps to explain the evolution of the arguments and frames employed by Catalan leaders, there doesn't appear to be a correlative change in symbolic politics that can account for the escalation of Catalan demands during the period in question.

For regions like Catalonia, Horowitz also predicts "severe discrimination; repeated violence; migration back to home region",⁷ though such major confrontations between Catalans

⁵ In fact, due to Catalonia's historical position as Spain's economic powerhouse, the region has long experienced a huge flow of economic immigrants from the poorer regions of Spain, particularly Andalucia. This has fostered dense inter-regional ties between these *comunidades* over time in a way that has not existed between Catalonia and Madrid.

⁶ Kaufman, 28

⁷ Horowitz, 258

and Castellanos are exceedingly rare outside of Franco's dictatorship. Furthermore, Catalonia weathered the regime period and the democratic transition that followed with secessionists as a small minority within the Catalanist movement. Horowitz's final prediction, that secessionism in Catalonia will be late to develop due to the comparatively heightened economic cost of separatism for wealthy regions, is mostly true in historical context. While it is true that Catalonia did not become staunchly secessionist until after the democratic transition of the 1970s and 80s, there was a well-defined Catalan nationalist and autonomist movement well before Spain had even found its footing with constructing a national identity.

Elsewhere in the same book, Horowitz discusses theories of social mobilization - including along ethnic lines - based on uneven modernization and the ensuing economic equality.⁸ This is clearly a huge part of the Catalan case (as discussed in Section 1.1), though unlike many of the modernization theories assume, because of the relative centralization of the Catalan population, the entirety of Catalonia was lifted by the region's modernization. As a result, the economic cleavage that developed into a growing identity gap encompassed the entire vertical strata of Catalan society, producing a massified and salient national identity based on ideals tightly linked to modernization and industrialization. This was combined by a relatively early development of workers' rights and ideologies that tended to benefit poor, blue-collar immigrants to Catalonia, pulling new arrivals into the Catalan identity. The uneven modernization of Spain has in many ways always been a central cause of continued separatist demands by the Catalans and others. However, given that this has been the case in Catalonia since the early 19th century, it cannot be said to account for the escalation between 2012 and 2017.

Conversely, the present *Castellano* identity was seriously shaped by the ontological crisis of the Spanish-American War on 1898, when the United States entered the ongoing

⁸ Horowitz, 99

Commented [1]: is this different from Spanish national identity? there are other advanced region nationalisms like maybe Scotland. Tom Nairn wrote that Scottish nationalism didn't develop during the nationalist age, but was delayed due to the fact that Scotland was relatively rich and didn't need the nationalism of the periphery.

Commented [2]: Interesting. Catalonia & Spain kind of did the opposite; advanced economic development in Catalonia led to the creation of a firm identity in order to justify the material gap between Cat and Span through more essentialized ways, meanwhile Spain was just a hot mess the whole time because they were too busy with like ten civil wars and a whole bunch of Catholicism, so Catalan ended up being a real thing well before "Spanish", especially after 1898, see addition

Commented [3]: are you going to work this into your argument??

Commented [4]: Not totally sure - seems like an important element of the foundation of the case, but I'm not sure it can really be considered to account for the radicalization of the last 15 years since uneven dev is basically a constant over the entirety of the Catalanist movement

conflict between Spain and its remaining colonies. After nearly a century of domestic turmoil in Spain, US forces were able to destroy the once-invincible Spanish navy in a matter of hours. This final end to the once-great Spanish empire was a humiliating demonstration of “Spain’s international isolation and irrelevance”.⁹ After 1898, the evident weakness of Castellano Spain caused a sharp rise in the popularity of regional or substate national identities across Spain, and an aggressive and xenophobic breed of nationalism began to form in the Spanish heartlands, especially Castile. While Catalanism was built on progress and modernization, the Spanish identity to emerge was tightly linked to traditional elements of the Spanish state, including the centrality of the Catholic Church and the authority of the crown.

While uneven development feels like a surefire explanation of the core of the Catalan case, other lenses, such as regime response, must be considered. A number of factors shape the reaction of the state to regional demands, and some of these variables will be specifically evaluated over the course of this paper. Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham provides a theoretical framework to predict when states will choose accommodation rather than civil war when faced with escalating separatist demands. Cunningham hypothesizes that the likelihood of accommodation increases with the number of factions in the self-determination movement and will be higher in moderately-divided states (rather than those with a high or low level of internal division, as defined by the number of veto factions present in the state’s government). Cunningham’s analysis of factionalization of self-determination groups as a determinant of concessions offered is less relevant in the modern democratic period, as the Spanish government deals exclusively with the *Generalitat*, and not extraneous factions pushing for Catalan self-determinism.

Furthermore, for a number of reasons the Catalan leadership can be fairly certain that Madrid will avoid escalation to violent conflict. This can be read through Douglass North’s

⁹ Moreno-Luzon, 56

framework of credible institutional commitments; now that democratized Spain is an active member of organizations like the European Union and the OSCE, Madrid has given very credible commitments to say that they will treat all of their minority populations fairly. These commitments are reinforced by the recent memory of fascist oppression under Franco, which disincentivizes Spanish politicians from pursuing options which may be viewed as following Franco's example. Given these structural limits on Spain's ability and willingness to offer punitive reactions to Catalan demands, it does not seem that a theoretical framework of credible commitments can be used in this case. However, as seen in Chapter Three, this disincentivization towards violence has its limits, beyond which regime responses may escalate to violence, as during the 2017 referendum on Catalan independence. Cunningham does potentially help to explain why the unification of the pro-independence parties into a single political bloc in 2015 did not lead to concessions from Madrid to demands for independence. However, the confrontations between Madrid and Barcelona which have ended in concessions have not overall represented the conditions outlined in Cunningham's model, as the number of veto powers in the Spanish state, as well as the number of Catalan factions acknowledged by Madrid have remained fairly constant over time, despite differing outcomes of Catalan demands for the same period. Additionally, with the threat of civil war essentially neutralized by Spain's history and contemporary standing in the international community, the alternative to accommodation becomes unclear. As is evident throughout the case, Spanish responses to Catalan demands in lieu of accommodation are often rhetorical or symbolic, rather than effectively punitive.

Alongside these theories on accommodation we have ethnic bargaining theory - in this thesis represented by Erin Jenne's 2007 *Ethnic Bargaining: The Paradox of Minority Empowerment* - builds a number of hypotheses about the formation of minority demands based largely on perceptions of relative positioning between majority and minority groups. In this model, increased minority demands come from an increase in a minority's perceived strength

compared to the central state. Jenne's model predicts that minority groups will escalate their demands when the central state is weak and they are relatively stronger. Some of the cases Jenne analyzes also contain third-party lobby states supporting the minority group. However, since the Catalans have no lobby state in their corner, this thesis will engage a pared-down dyadic bargaining schema. This model will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. In this thesis, we will consider the strength of the Catalan movement to be a measure of autonomy within Spain, as well as their economic strength and a pervasive and somewhat chauvinistic sense of difference to their *Castellano* neighbors.

Beyond ethnic bargaining, there is also a wealth of literature specifically on the causes of minority mobilization, including Ted Robert Gurr's theory of minority mobilization centered on "deep-seated grievances about group status and by the situationally determined pursuit of political interests".¹⁰ It is clear from even a cursory assessment of Catalan nationalist argumentation that both historical and contemporary grievances are central to the case, and appear to be a substantial motivator for separatist sentiments, as a central part of Catalonia's myth-symbol complex. The hypothesis of Gurr's 1993 article "Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict Since 1945" holds that "the strength of group identity and cohesion affects both grievances and potential mobilization"¹¹. However, through statistical analysis Gurr demonstrates that previous mobilization is the strongest determinant of "magnitudes of communal protest"¹² as a predictive measure. This does perhaps help to explain some level of escalation in the Catalan case given that the Catalanist movement has been mobilized since the 19th century.

Despite their political grievances, the presence of Catalans - and frequently nationalist Catalans - in the Spanish government also raises questions about the availability of legitimate

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Commented [6]: Maybe?

Commented [7]: say: Resource theory and social movement theory says that...

Commented [8]: ?

¹⁰ Gurr, 167

¹¹ Gurr, 174

¹² Gurr, 188

political opportunities for increased autonomy within Spain. Sumit Ganguly provides an excellent analysis of the interplay between political mobilization and institutional decay in Kashmir during the 1970s and 80s. Ganguly makes the argument that the perception of windows of opportunity drives elite decision-making, and that these decisions become problematic when based on fear of the regime response. The author points out that at various points in the Kashmir conflict the perception of these windows of opportunity closing has tended to cause a radicalization of demands and strategies.¹³ However, it can be difficult from the outside to assess when elites feel that they have a window of opportunity, especially when the minority leadership professes a complete distrust of the central state's government, as has been especially true in periods when Spain was run by the *Partido Popular* (Popular Party, PP). Founded by former members of Franco's regime, PP's centrality in Spanish politics consistently rubs minority nationalists the wrong way.

David Siroky & John Cuffe put forth a framework to assess the role of a region's history of autonomy on the development of separatist activism. Siroky & Cuffe found that the loss of autonomy was the best predictor of separatist demands, followed by present autonomy, with regions without a history of autonomy found to be the least likely to attempt to separate. This framework, while already backed up by the history of Catalanism, can be made to better fit the case if **frustrated attempts at increasing autonomy are considered as decreases in autonomy**.

This altered framework helps to take into account the realities of the contemporary Catalan case, in which - due to Spain's previously mentioned commitments to fair treatment of minority populations - loss of autonomy in Catalonia is a rare, limited, and generally temporary possibility at best. At the same time, the inability to increase autonomous rights generates a specific type of grievance that I argue is functionally similar in motivating escalating demands as the loss of autonomy would be.

¹³ Ibid.

Commented [9]: or I guess the other way around?

Commented [10]: autonomy-related grievances generated by a failure to increase autonomy (Madrid limiting the new Statute of Limitations or rejecting expanded fiscal autonomy) are functionally the same as a loss of autonomy in perceptions by minority groups -> anything that isn't a win is treated as an attack -> the regime's possible responses to increased demands limited, especially in a scenario without access to violent responses

Methodology and Thesis Statement

In this paper, I will analyze the radicalization of the Catalan nationalist movement since 2003, specifically aiming to find an explanation for why the turn towards independence came at a point of relative parity in power relations between Catalonia and Spain, and a high point of Catalan autonomy. The methodology for this paper will follow the framework provided by Jenne's 2007 book *Ethnic Bargaining*, with the model adapted to Table 0.1 below. This model should predict regime responses to minority demands based on the perceived positioning of the minority *vis-a-vis* the majority. In a co-authored piece by Jenne, along with Stephen M Saideman and Will Lowe, also from 2007, crystalizes the book's arguments, explaining minority radicalization through "negotiations between the minority and the center over institutions of the state".¹⁴ In order to conduct this analysis I have selected a series of confrontations between Madrid and Barcelona, representing such negotiations.

The dependent variable of this research is the orientation of the Catalan claims, as they shifted from autonomist to secessionist. The orientation of the movement broadscale is assessed by the predominant ideology of the parties holding power in the *Generalitat*, as Catalonia's system of proportional representation generally keeps the parliament representative of the Catalan voters. Additionally, the Catalan government represents the policies which will be pursued by the Catalan state, meaning that the orientation of the dominant parties may be expected to dramatically affect the orientation of proposed policies, and as mentioned above, Madrid only addresses the Catalanist movement through their presence in institutionalized systems of governance. Opinion poll data will also be included to further demonstrate public feelings on autonomy and secession, and may be found in Appendix A.¹⁵

A number of independent variables will be tested through the analysis of several periods of friction between Barcelona and Madrid. These events will be examined through the various

¹⁴ Jenne et al., 541

¹⁵ Please see the Statistical Sources section of the Bibliography for more information on survey data.

lenses the literature provides, with the goal of explaining increasing Catalan demands in the last fifteen years. These will include Jenne's model of ethnic bargaining (Table 0.1), which attributes escalating minority claims to increases in real or perceived leverage over the central state, and predicts the responses of the government based on a binary choice for either repression or accommodation. For the purposes of this research, a middle-ground response has been added, wherein the government does not crack down on the minority in question but also refuses to accommodate them, generally issuing symbolic or rhetorical responses with little punitive or disincentivizing value. Additionally, I will track the changes in Catalan requests for further devolution from Madrid against Madrid's allowances on these points. This will allow for the testing of a modified version of Siroky & Cuffe's theory of lost autonomy as a motivator for further pushes for autonomy. Finally, I will look at increases in Catalan grievances, to test Gurr's theoretical framework.

TABLE 0.1 - MODIFIED ETHNIC BARGAINING MODEL

	Repressive Majority	Disapproving Majority	Accommodationist Majority
Strong Minority	minority increases demands and government cracks down	minority increases demands and government refuses to meet them, but issues only rhetorical or symbolic response	minority increases demands and government backs down and grants concessions
Weak Minority	minority de-escalates demands and government persecutes them anyway	minority de-escalates demands and the situation remains tense, but calm	minority de-escalates demands and minority and majority coexist peacefully

It is my belief that through this research it will be demonstrated that minority demands may be radicalized when an inability to increase autonomy through a legal framework, catalyzed by substantial grievances held by the general population, combines with what leaders perceive

Commented [11]: but this sounds more like a grievances based argument. is it opportunities as well? Opportunities fits with the bargaining approach, if at least it is a contributing factor in accelerating demands.

(or feel they can claim) as a popular mandate to pursue independence. I believe this research will demonstrate that a narrowing of legal options for devolution, often through the creation and/or implementation of legal hurdles to self-determination or increased autonomy, counterintuitively push movements to rapid escalation of demands by fundamentally delegitimizing the central government in the eyes of minority nationalists. In the present case, this trend is combined with a lack of clear signaling from Madrid, based on a history of inconsistent responses to Catalan demands. Together, these two aspects of regime response essentially lock both sides of the conflict into their positions with little ability to bargain effectively, as together they have taken most otherwise-available concessions off the table.

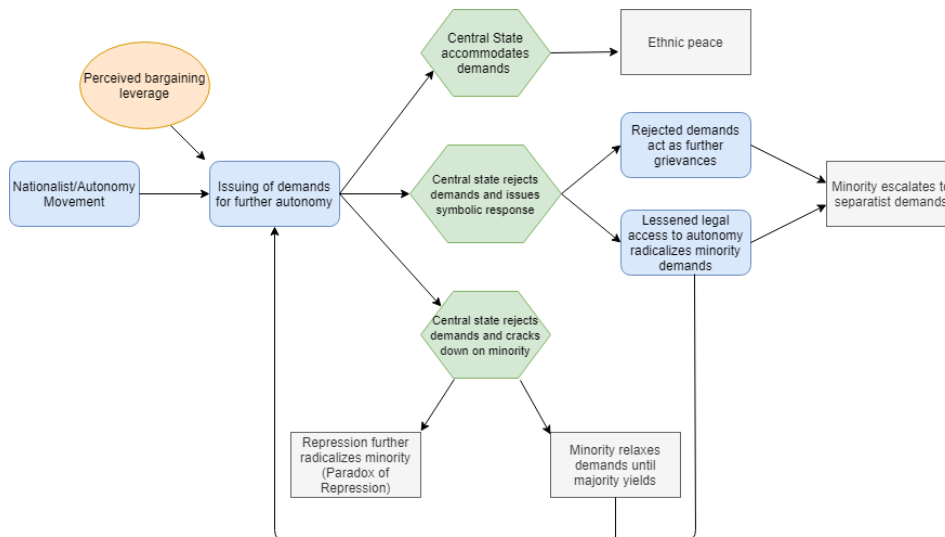
For example, (as discussed in Chapter 2) in both 2010 and 2012, Madrid made it clear that they were not going to grant any additional autonomous rights to Barcelona. These signals had two effects, one on the Catalan people and the other on the *Generalitat*. First, nationalist Catalans were once more reminded that they were ultimately under Spanish control, stoking the fire of Catalonia's long history of grievances. Second, the utility of working within the legal framework established by the Spanish government dropped dramatically for the political elites; if the legal way forward was guaranteed to be blocked, then the only way to achieve any real progress - and thereby fulfill promises to their constituents - is to act outside of the legally-sanctioned options. Additionally, if you consider Catalonia's claim to statehood as legitimate, and accept the inverse, that Spain's control of Catalonia is illegitimate, then you also accept that the laws which prop up this illegitimate control are unjust and therefore may be disobeyed in the pursuit of the larger ethical right of Catalan independence. I have mapped the likely outcomes within this frame in Figure 0.2 below.

The body of this thesis will consist of three chapters, which will cover the confrontations between Madrid and the contemporary separatist movement in Catalonia, including the shifting ideological orientation of the Catalan nationalist movement, and the Spanish regime responses, as well as the theoretical ramifications of these events, focusing in at a micro level on the years

2003-2017. In reality, the present crisis in Catalonia is ongoing, and at the time of this writing trials in Madrid over alleged charges including rebellion and sedition against Catalan political leaders who organized the 2017 referendum are still underway. At the same time, the April 2019 Spanish national elections reflected a national political landscape fractured over the issue of Catalan separatism - not least because of anxieties about the separatist desires of other *comunidades* of Spain - and accordingly a new government has been slow to emerge. Given the ongoing nature of the present separatist push, this chapter will end with the 2017 Catalan regional elections, and a brief discussion of the events 2017 to present will be kept for the final conclusions of this paper.

The period 2003-2017 will be broken into three thematic periods; 2003-2010, 2010-2012, and 2013-2017. Each of these periods represent a significant shift in the predominant ideology of the Catalan national movement broadly. In the first section, the Catalanist movement is staunchly autonomist, in the second we see the pivot from autonomism to separatism, and in the third the transformation to an independence movement has been completed. The confrontational events to be covered in these sections are the attempted amendments to the Catalan Statute of Autonomy beginning in 2005, the failure of talks between Madrid and Barcelona on increased fiscal autonomy in 2012, and the two unofficial and non-binding referenda, in 2014 and 2017. While these events represent a relatively short time period, these confrontations were met by a range of Spanish responses, though mostly these included only minor disincentives for continued activism.

Figure 0.2 – Broad Theoretical Model



Caveats and Notes

Finally, three concerns regarding the following thesis must be unpacked. First, there is the problematic of asserting anything as “Spanish”, given that Spain is a collection of semi-autonomous communities (*comunidades*), most of which have a clearly-defined identity of their own. However, during various periods of Spain’s history (including - but not limited to - the Franco years) the central government has attempted to iron out the cultural and linguistic differences within, and to replace them with a largely-manufactured identity. This base layer of Spanish cultural unity is the *Castellano* identity, with regional identities then layered on top. While *Castellano* literally refers to something or someone from Castile, the state-manufactured concept of identity propagated in the nineteenth century was based on the Castilian model. This underscores the centrality of Castile in the early history of unified Spain; as the Spanish heartland, and the largest of the independent constituent kingdoms which merged into the Spanish state, the broadening of *Castellano* as a concept also gave the Spanish identity an air of historicism that helped make up for the way Spain lagged behind other states - including

Catalonia¹⁶ - in constructing and disseminating a cohesive national identity. Furthermore, in recent decades, the percentage of Spaniards who identify primarily with their region has increased, while the proportion who identify primarily as Spanish has shrunk. These trends are not demonstrated evenly by all seventeen *comunidades*, but on the whole it appears that the salience of regional identity is increasing across Spain.¹⁷ For the purposes of this paper, in part to maintain consistency with the sources employed, the terms *Castellano* and Spanish will be used somewhat interchangeably.

Second, it is hardly ideal to discuss Spanish politics without a full discussion of either dictatorship or Spain's brutal Civil War. However, due to space concerns we are unable to give the War, the Franco regime, or the democratic transition which followed the detail they would require. Needless to say, the repression and attempted erasure of Spain's minority groups up until the transition in the late 1970s and early 80s halted any political action towards the devolution of powers from Madrid. In this era, with no legitimate avenues for advocacy, we witness the rise of the Basque terrorist group ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*, Basque Country and Freedom) in 1959. By contrast, for a number cultural and historical reasons, the regime era prompted the Catalanist movement to recenter itself as a largely-underground resistance movement against Franco's regime, cementing the preexisting bond between liberal values and the Catalan identity. Many scholars attribute this difference of outcomes to the historically

¹⁶ The uneven development that Horowitz cites as a source of political mobilization began in earnest in the early 1800s, with the sudden economic boom that accompanied Catalonia's industrialization furthering the material gap between Barcelona and the rest of Spain, ultimately leading to an evolution in Catalonia of laws, norms, and world view that created a "vaguely defined identity [...] by attributing to a different mentality the existing economic gap between Madrid and Barcelona" (Conversi, 11). This fledgling sense of self was an elitist movement, begun and championed by wealthy industrialists, but soon it grew into a full-blown cultural revival. The aptly-named Catalan Renaixanca (Rebirth) began in the 1830s and 40s as a literary movement, producing some of the first Catalan-language poems and novels. Unlike the initial economic impetus for Catalan nationalism, the cultural achievements of the Renaixanca were successful in massifying the movement beyond both elite social circles and the city of Barcelona. Rural elites, concerned by growing trends towards urbanization, were happy to enter into a literary and artistic movement that so glorified rural life and the Catalan landscape, even though they were staunchly opposed to the capitalist drives of their urban counterparts. This evolution ultimately created an enduring sense of identity which was also inclusive enough to fold in waves of immigrants.

¹⁷ Burg & Chernyha

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inclusive nature of Catalan nationalist, a movement for which the barrier for entry is essentially just learning the Catalan language, compared to the largely exclusionary nature of Basque nationalism, which tends towards more nativist definitions of belonging. Additionally, Basque is not a romance language, making integration into Basque Country much more difficult for immigrants (including those from the rest of Spain) than in Catalonia.

Finally, a note on relative responsibility among Spain's autonomous regions. This thesis focuses specifically on the relationship between Madrid and Barcelona. However, Catalonia is not Spain's only separatist region, and any discussion of successful Catalan bargaining with the Spanish state must be understood to have occurred in a complex ecosystem of various demands from other minority groups in Spain. The Basque case specifically¹⁸ shares many parallels with Catalonia, as is to be expected, though they also diverge in a number of key ways. There are a great many theories to explain why the Basque movement escalated to terrorist activities while the Catalans did not. Daniele Conversi puts forth a solid case for how the relative difficulty of learning the Basque language as opposed to Catalan shaped the orientation of the nationalist movements that formed as either inclusive or exclusive movements based on outsiders' abilities to integrate meaningfully into the regional cultural whole. Conversi's 1997 book, *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain*, disentangles the converging and diverging elements of Basque and Catalan history and activism much more clearly than would be possible in a paper of this length, and in order to give either of the two cases the attention they deserve, the other will have to be excluded. The absence of a discussion of Basque nationalist activism is not a judgement on the relative validity or importance of the two movements, and a number of other pragmatic concerns went into the selection of the Catalan case.

Commented [IS14R13]: Appendix

¹⁸ The Galicians also have a historical separatist movement, as does Andalusia to an extent, but traditionally Catalonia and Basque Country have led the charge. Often alongside Catalan- and Basque-speaking minority populations in Navarre, Valencia, and the Balears.

Chapter One - 2003-2010: The Fight for Autonomy

In November 2003, the people of Catalonia elected the 7th *Generalitat* since the return of home-rule during the democratic transition (results in Appendix B). The government that emerged was led by a leftist coalition, dominated by a merger of PSC (the Socialist Party of Catalonia) and CpC (Citizens for Change) which came away with 42 seats in the Catalan parliament. Rounding out the coalition was ICV-EUiA (a coalition between greens and other small leftist parties) with 9 seats, and the pro-independence ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia) with 24. Both PSC-CpC and ICV-EUiA were and have always been against independence but have fluctuated over time in their support for increased autonomous rights. The government elected in 2003 marked the first time in Catalonia's post-Franco government that Jordi Pujol's center-right CiU (Convergence and Union) had not been at the center of the leading coalition, though these had contained parties either to their left or their right, depending on the election cycle.

The PSC-ICV-ERC coalition, which would keep hold of the *Generalitat* until the 2010 regional elections (results in Appendix B), became known as the Tripartite Government, and they would be the first to challenge Spain on the status of Catalonia's autonomy. This challenge came in the form of an amended Statute of Autonomy. While this remains an exceedingly Catalan story, the original impetus for the amended Statute was inspired by Basque attempts at dramatically redefining their own Statute in 2003. The Basque draft redefined the Basque Country as a "community' freely associated with Spain"¹⁹, which was immediately shot down by the Spanish government for being overly vague and far-reaching, with the potential to act as legal justification for carrying out independent foreign policy and other powers exclusive to Madrid. While these Basque ambitions were ultimately fruitless, several of the other 16

¹⁹ Acierno, 688

autonomous communities of Spain began drafting amendments to their own Statutes, with Catalonia's being the most sweeping.²⁰ This wave of Statute drafts suggests that the regional governments of Spain perceived the central government of the period as a relatively weak one, prepared to make potentially-massive concessions to not just one but many of their constituent regions.

The original 1979 *Statute of Sau* had provided for Catalonia's cultural, linguistic, and political freedoms after the restoration of democracy, but in their 2005 draft of amendments the Tripartite Government demanded further devolution of authority from Madrid to Barcelona. Furthermore, the amended Statute defined Catalonia officially as a "nation" in its preamble, which Spanish unionists saw as a decided threat to the state. However, the Catalan amendments were still much milder than the Basque "free association" proposal, and with several *comunidades* making similar demands on Madrid, it's easy to see the leverage that Catalan leaders felt they had. In June 2006, a referendum on whether to adopt the new Statute passed with 78.07% of the vote. The turnout rate was only 48.85%, leading to criticisms of the Tripartite Government's acceptance of the results even though they represented a minority of Catalan voters, though this issue would soon become a hallmark of Catalan separatist activism. The amended Statute entered into effect in Catalonia in August of 2006. |

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The *Partido Popular* (PP), which had just been unseated in the 2004 Spanish elections - shortly after presiding over the blocking of the Basque Statute draft - immediately demanded a judicial review of the proposed amendments by the Spanish Constitutional Court. The fact that the challenge came from the hated PP, who had previously been in power for over a decade straight, stirred up nationalist resentments in Catalonia, where many felt Spain was impeding their right to autonomy, which tracks to our modified version of Siroky & Cuffe's framework of

²⁰ Interestingly, it appears few of these drafts passed without the Spanish Courts making serious alterations, including *comunidades* such as Andalucia, which have no active separatist movements at present.

increased demands as a result of frustrated attempts to increase autonomy. The judicial review of the amended Statute was not completed until 2010, and the protracted nature of this conflict fueled additional nationalist anxieties within Catalonia over Spain's continued authority over Catalan affairs; to many nationalists the endless wait for Spanish approval to a document which had been approved by both the Catalan people and the *Generalitat* shouldn't have been necessary at all, and the years that passed felt like a targeted action by the Spanish government to undermine the *Generalitat*. As a result, while it seems likely the Spanish judiciary hoped tensions would calm during a delay in producing a legal opinion, the wait had the opposite effect, and instead providing a new thread of Catalan grievance that pushed an increasing percentage of Catalans into the nationalist movement at a time when the movement itself was radicalizing from autonomist to separatist. Additionally, from a Catalan perspective, the review of democratically-approved changes to the Catalan government did constitute a new limitation on their autonomy.

With Catalonia acting from a position of relative strength, making lesser demands than their Basque counterparts, and fitting their demands into a broader negotiation of regional autonomy in Spain, the *Generalitat* had clearly calculated their moves. For their part, the Spanish government - faced with increasing demands from even relatively low-maintenance regions - opted against accommodating the majority of these demands. Jenne's model predicts that a strong minority combined with a regime that favors repression over accommodation may lead to a government crackdown on minority groups. However, the Spanish government held to their international commitments to minority rights, and their response to Catalonia was relatively mild; ultimately declaring 14 articles of the new Statute unconstitutional and dictating interpretations for a further 22 (of 223 total). The articles stricken from the amended Statute ranged in subject from a restructuring of the Catalan judiciary, the expansion of powers of the Ombudsman of Catalonia (the *Síndic de Greuges*), Catalonia's rights to regulate taxation, and

changes to the region's language laws.²¹ In the same decision, issued 28 June 2010, the Courts also ruled that the term "nation" in the Statute's preamble had no legal bearing on Catalonia's autonomy. Spain's attempt to rein in the Catalan nationalists soon backfired though, as tens of thousands of people took to the street to protest what they considered to be a subversion of their own democratic process by a corrupt Spanish state. The mass-scale popular mobilizations that follow each of Madrid's decisions to limit the growth of Catalan autonomy suggests that grievance was a very large part of increasing popular support for increased autonomy and ultimately separatism.

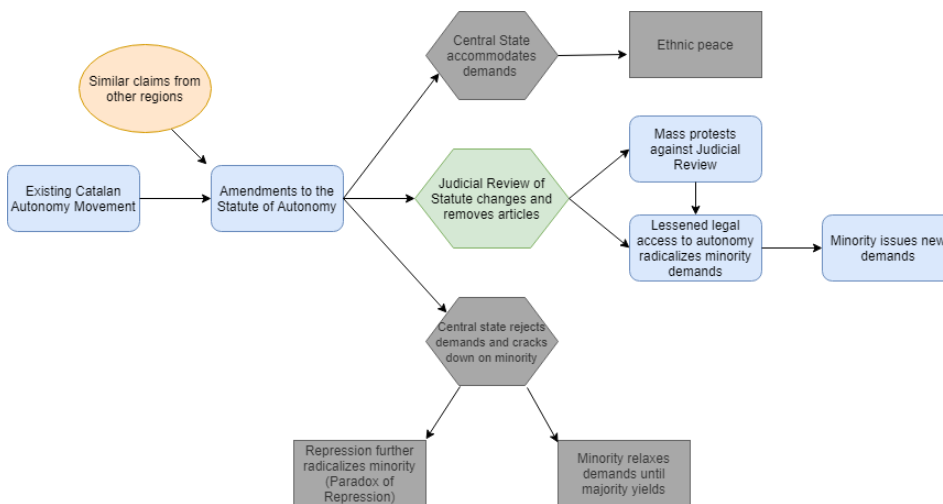
To follow the flowchart of probable outcomes from the introduction, we see that in this instance the existing Catalan autonomy movement, viewing the wave of regional autonomy discussions occurring at the time as a source of leverage over Madrid, issued a demand for further autonomy. The Spanish government did not reject the draft outright, but did make changes to the amendments after they were approved by the Catalan people and government. This was received as a major source of grievance in Catalonia, leading to further future demands. This can be seen in Figure 1.2 below.

²¹ Lazaro

TABLE 1.1 – ETHNIC BARGAINING MODEL (CHAPTER ONE)

	Repressive Majority	Disapproving Majority	Accommodationist Majority
Strong Minority	minority increases demands and government cracks down	minority increases demands and government refuses to meet them, but issues only rhetorical or symbolic response - Statute of Autonomy amendments	minority increases demands and government backs down and grants concessions
Weak Minority	minority de-escalates demands and government persecutes them anyway	minority de-escalates demands and the situation remains tense, but calm	minority de-escalates demands and minority and majority coexist peacefully

FIGURE 1.2 – THEORETICAL MAP OF CHAPTER ONE



Chapter Two - 2010-2012: Sea Change

Five months after the Spanish Courts ruled on the amended Statute of Autonomy, elections were held for the 9th *Generalitat* (results in Appendix B). The Tripartite Government suffered in the polls due to their draft's unfortunate fate, and CiU was returned to power, now headed by Artur Mas and running on an autonomist platform. Securing 62 seats in the regional legislature, CiU was able to hold on to a minority government, reaching out alternately to ERC and PSC-CpC on the left and PP on the right to guarantee an absolute majority when needed, a process known in Catalonia as variable geometry.

The political landscape in Catalonia had changed dramatically over the four years of the Statute's legal review in Madrid. Beginning late in 2009, as a result of a grassroots campaign of popular mobilization across Catalonia, municipalities all over the region held unofficial, non-binding "public queries" (*consultes populars*) on the subject of independence. These votes were not organized by the *Generalitat*, but rather local governments assisted by social movements, particularly the Popular Unity Candidacy (*Candidatura d'Unitat Popular*, CUP), a collective of local assemblies representing towns and neighborhoods. CUP did not fully complete its transition to a formal political party until too late to contest the 2010 elections, but remained a crucial actor pushing the *Generalitat* towards separatism. CUP's ideology was not only staunchly separatist, but also pan-Catalanist, aimed at reuniting the full linguistic population of Catalans in Aragon, Valencia, Murcia, and Balears with Catalonia. This casual irredentism is considered entirely unacceptable by Spanish authorities, as well as being unpalatable to the non-Catalan majorities in Aragon and Murcia, where Catalan is not even recognized as an official language.

The municipal queries were focused in exurban areas of Catalonia, where separatist sentiments tend to be the strongest, and while they continued into 2011 the results were mixed; while a decided majority of the votes cast overall were for independence, those votes

represented less than a third of the electorate. Furthermore, the nature of the consultations left it unclear to voters what exactly the stakes were of the vote, and accordingly it is hard to know how seriously to take the results as an outside observer. Many of the municipalities also specified in the text of the question that an independent Catalonia would be fully-integrated into the EU, an assertion for which there was no legitimate proof. Additionally, though the voting age in Spain is 18 in all cases, the participation age for the public queries was set at 16, skewing the results as an objective means of assessing electorate support for independence.

The reasoning for such a choice was clear; CUP and their allies in planning the query process wanted to inflate their leverage in future bargaining with the mainstream Catalan political parties by inflating the number of affirmative votes cast. The larger Catalan parties would later pick up the same statistical fallacies to leverage their position in discussions with Madrid. According to regional surveys conducted by the *Generalitat*, 21.6% of eligible Catalan voters supported independence in late 2009, rising to 24.5% by early 2011, compared with upwards of 80% affirmation in all reported municipal query results. As we will continue to see over the course of the Catalan story, voting results can be easily manipulated by neglecting to report things like turnout rates in order to claim broad support and a popular mandate for the pursuit of pro-independence policies. According to CEO's surveys (performed within the institutional framework of the *Generalitat*), support for independence over other forms of association in Spain has not passed 48.5% at any point in the last 15 years (Appendix A).

Problematics of the queries aside, with the public's growing support for independence evident, in 2012 CiU entered into talks with the PP government in Madrid, headed by Mariano Rajoy, about increasing Catalonia's fiscal autonomy. Catalonia entered into these talks from a position of relative strength; on paper it appeared that the *Generalitat* had a strong public mandate to pursue independence, though as unofficial and nonbinding as the municipal query process had been. Madrid did not feel the same, summarily refusing to acknowledge the results of unsanctioned and constitutionally-questionable municipal votes on an issue as serious as

separatism. While Catalonia entered the talks believing they were set for a win, the PP government under Rajoy was staunchly opposed to further autonomy for the minority regions, and throughout the summer of 2012 Catalan officials claimed their Spanish counterparts had threatened Catalonia's autonomous self-rule if the region did not make concessions to Madrid.²² Instead of an easy victory, CiU found that they had walked into a trap; the leverage they thought they held - the sudden popular support for independence - was useless in their dealings with Madrid, and the Spanish government had not changed their stance against accommodation of minority demands. However, refusing to make concessions while lacking the ability to make credible threats of action severe enough to disincentivize future Catalan demands, Madrid's response did nothing to cool rising tensions in Catalonia.

Mas' attempts to seek resolution through increased autonomy within Spain follow Horowitz's framework for wealthy regions, which are expected to pursue independence only as a last resort due to the heightened economic costs for them to secede. The need for these talks from the Catalan perspective was shaped heavily by the circumstances of the 2008 financial collapse. The Spanish economy had been hit hard and was slow to recover, and the austerity measures pushed on Spain by other members of the Eurozone were seen by many Catalan nationalists as unfairly punishing Catalonia - one of the strongest *comunidades* economically - for Spain's mistakes. The cut in public spending that came along with austerity measures was similarly viewed as a punitive measure in Catalonia - though it should be mentioned that many of these austerity measures were written into the Catalan budget by conservative elements within CiU as much as by Madrid or Brussels, and therefore likely would not have ended with increased fiscal autonomy for Catalonia. However, by reframing the debate as one of *Castellano* oppression of Catalan self-determination, CiU was able to keep the generally anti-austerity independence movement with them, marking a successful employment of Kaufman's myth-

²² Santos, Martin, Bamberg & Kerevan

symbol complex. The public queries themselves could be considered a Gurrían mobilization in response to mounting economic grievances. However, backed by the sudden independence fervor of the Catalan populace, the *Generalitat* continued to pressure Madrid for a renegotiation of their fiscal autonomy. Rajoy and his party's resistance to negotiating with the Catalans raised a number of complaints among Catalan nationalists. Chief among these being the central argument against PP as a feature of the post-Franco democratic landscape.

Throughout the summer of 2012, CiU and PP remained locked in a stalemate, with neither side willing to accept the other's demands or de-escalate their own. It was also during this period that Mas first began to float the idea of a referendum on independence, copying the then-speculative Scottish plan for a referendum. On 11 September 2012, roughly 1.5 Catalans marched in Barcelona in the largest pro-independence rally in Catalan history. The growing demonstrations calling for a discussion of the independence question, coupled with the total breakdown of the talks with PP in August pushed CiU (specifically one of the bloc's constituent parties, Artur Mas' Democratic Convergence of Catalonia, or CDC²³) finally towards independence.

Traditionally, CiU had always run a nationalist and autonomist platform, with the exact orientation shifting between the two. Unlike ERC, and some of the smaller, more radical nationalist parties, CiU had previously stood in opposition to any discussion of wholesale independence from Spain. However, a summer of pressures from the Catalan people, combined with a policy of log-jamming by the PP government in Madrid, finally turned the tide. Mas called for regional elections soon after the 11 September demonstrations. While CiU continued to campaign as a nationalist rather than independentist party, it was clear from the events of the

²³ The other constituent party of CiU, Democratic Union of Catalonia (UDC), was substantially smaller and more conservative than CDC, and the independence issue ultimately fractured the alliance between the two parties, which had lasted through the entirety of the post-Franco democratic era. On their own, UDC ran in the 2015 elections, but did not reach the 3% minimum threshold. They then merged into the PSC coalition for subsequent regional elections.

past several months that their positioning on the independence question was shifting dramatically. The conversion of CiU to a pro-independence movement was a monumental tipping point for the strength of the movement, propelling the independence question into the center of not only Catalan politics, but Catalan society and public life as well. CiU's leadership maintained that the elections were called in the wake of both wide scale independence protests and the failure of fiscal autonomy talks with Madrid, more cynical observers have "held that the call was a move to distract voters' attention from the unpopular austerity policies implemented by the regional government, in order to avoid being punished at the polls and hence to secure a more comfortable majority".²⁴

If that had been the plan, it backfired spectacularly; CiU won only 50 seats, compared to the 62 with which they had run the *Generalitat* from 2010 to 2012. This drop off in support was crucial for two reasons. First, the sudden resurgence of support for the pro-independence ERC-CatSi (ERC, plus Catalonia for Yes, or CatSi, and a handful of independents for independence),²⁵ who jumped from 10 seats to 21 in the 2012 elections, marked what was perceived by CiU and other parties as a major leap towards independence as the main voting issue in Catalan regional politics.²⁶ Second, with only 50 seats, the variable geometry days were over and CiU would need to choose a coalition partner if they hoped to stay in government. No longer in a position of power in the *Generalitat*, CiU chose to get on board with the separatist movement, both because it was gathering more and more popular support and because ERC-CatSi - the most pro-independence of the mainstream Catalan parties, had found itself riding a sudden wave of popularity. In fact, CiU's new ideology and ERC-CatSi's new position as the

²⁴ Rico & Liñeira, 268-9

²⁵ The ERC-CatSi alliance had originally been brokered to jointly contest the 2011 Spanish national elections, in which ERC-CatSi received three of the 47 Catalan seats in the *Congreso de los Diputados* but unfortunately did not reach the minimum threshold for an elected seat in the Spanish Senate

²⁶ It is impossible to assess how accurate these perceptions are, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The Catalan government has been historically reticent to conduct surveys or opinion polls which may undermine their claims of broad public support for independence.

second-largest bloc in the newly-elected Catalan parliament made the two natural allies. On 21 December, an investiture vote solidified the coalition, and kept Artur Mas as President of the *Generalitat*.

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While CiU had formed coalitions with ERC in previous electoral cycles, the 2012 elections and government formation marked a distinct increase in the weight of independence as a consideration among Catalan voters, and accordingly the CiU-ERC coalition that emerged was openly ready to discuss separatism. While ERC had always been pro-independence, that alignment had very quickly shifted from largely symbolic to concrete enough to risk a major confrontation with Madrid. The last confrontation between Barcelona and Madrid - Mas' unsuccessful bid to increase Catalonia's fiscal autonomy - had been ill-received by the conservative PP government, as had the confrontation over the Statute of Autonomy before that. As the grassroots Catalan independence movement found their allies now running the *Generalitat* following the 2012 elections, the movement was starting to look like an unstoppable force. At the same time, the conservative government in Madrid dug in to make themselves an immovable object. The result was an uncomfortable stalemate with heavy ideological and historical overtones. Under PP especially, any Spanish objection to the will of the Catalan people could be viewed as a continuation of the repression faced under Franco, a high-water mark for the abject failures of the democratic transition, and - perhaps most importantly - further reasons why independence was now the only way for a free and empowered Catalonia to exist, and these heavily ideational frames resonated with the actively-radicalizing Catalan populace.

Figure 2.2 – Theoretical Map of Chapter Two

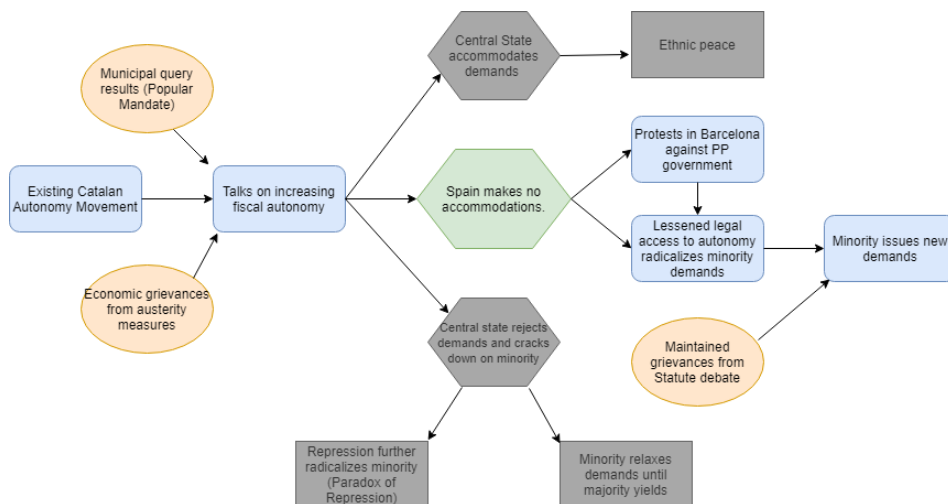


Table 2.3 – Ethnic Bargaining Model (Chapter Two)

	Repressive Majority	Disapproving Majority	Accommodationist Majority
Strong Minority	minority increases demands and government cracks down	minority increases demands and government refuses to meet them, but issues only rhetorical or symbolic response <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fiscal autonomy negotiations 	minority increases demands and government backs down and grants concessions
Weak Minority	minority de-escalates demands and government persecutes them anyway	minority de-escalates demands and the situation remains tense, but calm	minority de-escalates demands and minority and majority coexist peacefully

Chapter Three - 2013-2017: The Fight for Independence

What had begun as a nationalist and autonomist push in 2005 with the amendments to the Statute of Autonomy had been reshaped substantially by Spain's frustration of what Catalonia perceived as their right to self-governance. After the judicial review of the Statute began the mobilization process, anger over Spain's economic difficulties catalyzed the radicalization of the movement, compounded further when Rajoy refused to make concessions to the Catalans on the issue of fiscal autonomy in 2012. By 2014, years of mass pro-independence demonstrations had left their mark on Catalan politics, as evidenced by the ruling coalition of CiU and ERC. In September 2014, the Catalan parliament passed a resolution calling for a referendum on the independence issue. Spain immediately responded that any such referendum would be non-binding without permission from Madrid - something that Rajoy's conservative government would not even consider. The Catalan response was similarly non-negotiable; the *Generalitat* declared the Spanish Constitutional Court illegitimate and declared that they would refuse to recognize any legal opinions on the vote or any Spanish reactions to it, though – for reasons unclear – they agreed to Rajoy's demand that they suspend the referendum and all related campaigning. It appeared that the years of mild disapproval as a policy to curb Catalan mobilization had not only been ineffective, but ultimately had had the opposite result.

Under continuing pressures from Madrid, the *Generalitat* changed the titling of the vote from a non-binding referendum to a popular consultation, which brought them into line with the letter of Spanish law, if not the spirit. The Catalan leadership seemed confident that while Spain may refuse to offer them accommodations, they would also be unlikely to retaliate. This seems likely given Spain's credible international commitments to minority rights, as well as the minimal repercussions of the previous Catalan demands. In their previous interactions, Madrid had set a precedent for minimal interference in Catalan affairs and as a result any threats that came from

Madrid in the lead-up to the 2014 referendum were not seen as credible. Mas and others in the *Generalitat* publically maintained that a vote on the subject of independence would be held, regardless of Madrid's assessment of its legality. They further threatened to bring a case in front of the Constitutional Court against Rajoy's government for violating Catalonia's constitutional rights to self-governance, despite the fact that the Spanish constitution makes it very clear that neither separatism nor official referenda are rights afforded to the autonomous communities.²⁷ It is unclear exactly what leverage the Catalan elites felt that they had in the impending showdown, but in reality they were violating both Spanish and Catalan laws to prove the dominance of an independence movement that in reality (according to the *Generalitat's* own data) accounted for only about 45% of Catalan voters.²⁸

The feud between Madrid and Barcelona turned into a standoff, with the vote going ahead in November 2014, ostensibly because neither side stopped it; Madrid had not specified precisely what would happen should the vote take place aside from a vague and parental kind of 'or else'. With no clear messaging from Madrid and a history of lenient responses to Catalan shenanigans, the *Generalitat* had nothing to gain by cancelling the vote and potentially a huge symbolic victory if they held it. There's a salient point to be argued that after only four decades of democratic rule, the Spanish still have a few kinks to work out of the system; without authoritarian disciplinary measures, Madrid didn't really know how to handle such challenges to their authority.

The *Generalitat* considered the vote a huge success, even though its legal status was not entirely clear to Madrid, Barcelona, or the Catalan voters. The ballot contained two questions, first "Do you want Catalonia to become a state?" and second, in the case of an

²⁷ Under Spanish law, any potential independence claim by the comunidades is required to pass a national referendum, as the dissolution of the Spanish state is considered to be an issue affecting all Spaniards.

²⁸ CEO "Barometre"

affirmative answer, “Do you want this state to be independent?”.²⁹ There were no definitions provided to voters on the specifics of the process or meanings of the terms “state” or “independent”, which prompted criticisms from observers in Catalonia, Spain, and the rest of Europe. Slightly over 90% of the respondents voted “Yes” on the first question, but this bloc split 80%-10% on their approval of the second question. Roughly 4.5% voted “No” to the first question. However, the 80.76% “double yes” outcome lauded by the pro-independence government represented only approximately 35-40% of Catalan voters. The exact turnout numbers are not known as the *Generalitat* declined to release them after the vote - a choice that many point to as evidence that the turnout was problematically low to justify the broad claims put forth by the government - but various media outlets reported their estimates. The strength of the 2014 voting results as an argument for independence are further complicated by the opinion polling done prior to the vote, with results of the official polling in Appendix B.

Irregularities in the responses aside, Madrid was shaken by the perceived rebellion of the *Generalitat*. In terms of theoretical explanations for the decision to go forward with the referendum, the perception of a Catalan advantage in relative strength could be an explanatory factor, though given that Madrid had stymied the last two attempts at increased autonomous rights, it is unclear exactly how these calculations were carried out by Catalan political elites, but a rough approximation is shown in Figure 3.1. Unlike the two previous failures, which are explained by Gurr’s framework of mobilization following rising grievances, and perhaps by the modified Siroky and Cuffe framework on changes in autonomy, the choice to hold the 2014 referendum seems like a calculated risk to test the limits of Madrid’s tolerance.

There had been fears among the Catalan people and government going into the 2014 referendum that Madrid would mobilize the *Guardia Civil* in a *Franquisto* attempt to put an end to the vote, but these proved unfounded. However, Madrid summarily refused to acknowledge

²⁹ “Diari Oficial De La Generalitat De Catalunya.”, 21

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the referendum results, and soon filed charges against Artur Mas and several members of his cabinet for disobeying Madrid's directive to cancel to vote, as well as for mismanagement of funds relating to election-related expenditures. While Spanish nationalists called for a ten-year ban on Mas serving in public office, the sentence that was finally passed down was only a two-year ban, which was later cut further to thirteen months.³⁰ The original sentence was not handed down until early 2017,³¹ while Mas' tenure as president of the *Generalitat* lasted until January 2016. This timeline further throws into question the credibility of Madrid's commitments to enacting consequences for disobedience; the punishment ended up being moot, as Mas was removed from office during coalition-forming negotiations following the 2015 elections, with CiU's partners unwilling to back any government led by Mas. This was more for reasons of practical governance and Mas' willingness to implement austerity measures in Catalonia than any impending court verdict.

Following the mitigated success of the 2014 referendum, Artur Mas called snap elections, and instructed the Catalan people to consider these regional elections as a further plebiscite on independence, in lieu of a referendum approved by Madrid. The 2015 elections became a defining moment - for better or for worse - in Catalan politics (results in Appendix B). Artur Mas' original call for the symbolic treatment of the elections, as well as the campaigning of the pro-independence parties, reduced the political discourse to a single issue. Simultaneously, most of the pro-independence parties reorganized into a single pro-independence bloc, with the exception of CUP, who ran an independent campaign and came away with ten seats. The resulting bloc, Junts pel Si (Together for Yes, JxSi) included CDC (and/or their successor, Artur Mas' PdeCat). ERC, DC, Mes, and many smaller parties, as well as activist and civil organizations all united by their shared dream of an independent Catalonia. Again the pro-independence movement had achieved a huge symbolic victory, which provided them with

³⁰ Rincon, Garcia (2019)

³¹ Garcia (2017)

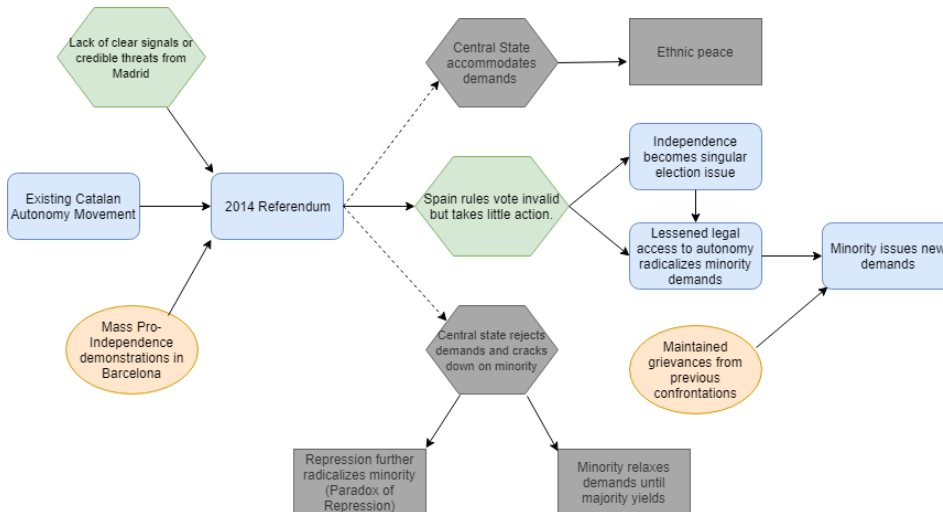
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further questionable statistics suggesting majority support for independence, even though CEO's data suggested about 37-40% support for independence at the time of the elections. Meanwhile, CUP and JxSi received 8.21% and 39.59% of the vote in 2015, respectively. Given that the regional election turnout was roughly double that of the referendum (75%), the 47.8% of the population that voted for pro-independence parties is certainly a more accurate count than the referendum results, though the difference between the election results and the CEO survey data suggests that not all voters considered independence to be the only election issue.

JxSi came away with 62 seats, just six shy of an absolute majority. Surprising no one, CUP agreed to support a JxSi government in exchange for only minor concessions in order to advance the separatist platform, though two CUP representatives abstained from the final investiture vote. A second, less radical bloc also emerged, Cat Si que es Pot (Catalonia Yes We Can), running on a self-determination platform. Cat Si que es Pot was a coalition of Podemos (a left-wing Spanish national party), ICV-EUiA, and Equo (a Spanish green party that runs on the Podemos lists nationally) and did respectably well for their first Catalan showing, pulling 11 seats.

FIGURE 3.1 – THEORETICAL MAP OF THE 2014 REFERENDUM



With a united, staunchly pro-independence government in Barcelona, Madrid had to keep a hardline position on the separatist issue or risk escalating demands from other minority communities, and possibly the disintegration of the Spanish kingdom as it had stood for centuries. But one campaign promise sat at the center of JxSi's victory; the guarantee that they would organize an official (and therefore binding) referendum on independence. Despite the fact that by this point support for independence was already waning, those loyal to the cause had been seriously radicalized.³² This extremely vocal minority was now heavily aggrieved following Madrid's rejection of the previous vote, dramatically increasing the risk of future conflict between the two.

Shortly after the elections, the *Generalitat* – now led by President Carles Puigdemont (CDC) – issued the Declaration of the Initiation of the Process of Independence of Catalonia.

³² Tortella

This document established the first beginnings of a framework for the creation of an independent Catalan government and national constitution following their successful separation from Spain, and also marks the beginning of Catalonia's fully-focused attempt at independence. The Declaration passed in parliament with the backing of the 72 members of the ruling coalition, and the entire 63-seat opposition united against. The parliament was similarly divided nearly two years later when the JxSi-CUP bloc unilaterally passed the Law on the Referendum on Self-Determination of Catalonia in September 2017. The PP government in Madrid quickly brought four separate unconstitutionality claims against the law to the Constitutional Court. While the Court had ruled the law - and therefore all preparations for the referendum - suspended pending judicial review, the Catalans went ahead with their plans, causing the Attorney General of Spain to announce his intentions to bring charges against politicians who had voted in favor of the referendum law. Additionally, the Courts specifically forbade members of the Catalan media and government, as well as all 948 municipalities from taking part in any preparations for the vote. When the municipalities were asked by the *Generalitat* to state whether they supported the referendum, 726 reported their positions. Of these 682 supported the vote, but among the 41 who refused and the 3 whose answers were ambiguous were all of the key population centers. These included Barcelona as well as two of the three other provincial capitals, Lleida and Tarragona.

The division between the increasingly-bold JxSi government and the national and unionist parties in the *Generalitat* continued to deepen as it became clear that JxSi intended to deliver the referendum they'd promised voters, no matter how Madrid chose to respond. At the same time, Rajoy's government in Madrid made it extremely clear that they would prosecute any attempts at a binding referendum or declaration of independence to the fullest extent. However, Madrid's previous reactions to Catalan demands had already undercut the credibility of any future threats. After watching Artur Mas receive only about a tenth of the sentence

Spanish hardliners had pushed for, the pro-independence government didn't consider Madrid's vague threats of Spanish justice to be real deterrents.

Despite JxSi and CUP's enthusiasm - as well as tepid support for a referendum by Cat Si que es Pot, hoping to end the independence debate once and for all - the legal framework established by Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy and the Spanish Constitution posed several basic pragmatic hurdles to holding an official referendum without Madrid's approval. For example, the centralized but autonomous National Institute of Statistics is the only body in Spain with the official electoral rolls. Access to these rolls can only be granted by the Spanish legislature. It is unclear what rolls were used in the 2017 referendum, but the fact that they could not have been the official, census-based rolls has undermined the results of the referendum.³³ Even before the official announcement of the referendum - which was ultimately delayed from August to September 2017, cracks began to appear in the JxSi government.

Throughout 2017, it became more and more evident that Madrid would not back down on their claims that such a referendum would be illegal, with the implications that Mas' fate following the 2014 referendum was likely to be milder than the repercussions of organizing a second referendum, and that Rajoy's government would consider claims that a new referendum represented an official vote on independence to constitute a grave offense against the Spanish state. Puigdemont dismissed members of his government who balked at the coming confrontation, replacing them with more fervent supporters of independence. The head of

³³ Similarly, under Spanish law, all of the ballot boxes for official elections must be provided by Spanish authorities, who soon made it abundantly clear no boxes would be given for an independence referendum. There are still substantial debates ongoing about the provenance of not only the ballot boxes used in the 2017 referendum, but also the paper ballots themselves. Several Catalan leaders are currently on trial in Madrid for - among other, more serious charges - misuse of public funds based on allegations that these election materials were purchased using the official funds of the Generalitat. Members of the now-former government refute these charges, maintaining that the materials were purchased by an anonymous private citizen.

Catalonia's regional police force, the *Mossos d'Esquadra*³⁴ resigned without giving a reason, but many observers believe he did not want to be put in a position of having to enforce court orders from Madrid against the *Generalitat*. With Rajoy sending clear signals that Madrid favored repression over accommodation, this shuffle among the Catalan elites suggests that there was some preparation for the outcome the model predicts; a serious crackdown by Spanish authorities. There appears to have been a concerted effort to stack both the *Mossos* and the *Generalitat* with members of the independence movement who were both ready and willing to face grave consequences for their beliefs.

Ultimately, it seems Madrid was unwilling to trust any Catalan police cooperation in halting the referendum. Instead, the High Court of Justice of Catalonia (TSJC)³⁵ agreed to hear another set of criminal complaints against the referendum's organizers, and the number 13 trial court of Barcelona instructed the *Guardia Civil* to carry out a broad operation against the independence movement. What followed, codenamed Operation Anubis, spanned September 2017 and included police raids on dozens of media outlets, government ministries, and private companies, a wave of arrests, and seizure of documents and devices said to be related to the referendum organization. On 20 September, Madrid announced that they would be sending additional police reinforcements to Barcelona and Tarragona by ship. On the same day, thousands of protesters successfully occupied the CUP headquarters to prevent the entry of National Police officers into the building. Images of the *Policia Nacional* and the *Guardia Civil* raiding both political and private offices and arresting outspoken advocates of an independent Catalonia called up the cultural memories of the years of Franco's consolidation of power, when

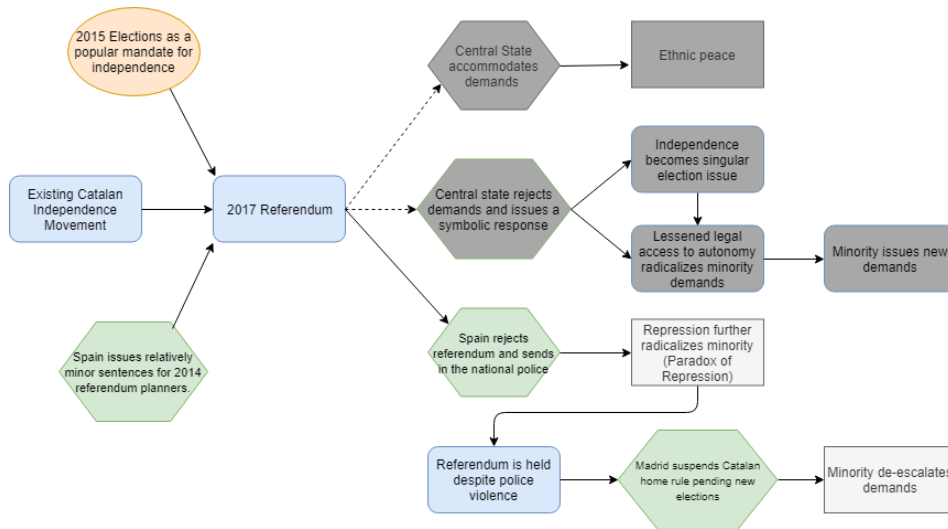
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³⁴ During the devolution of powers to the autonomous communities in the immediate post-Franco years, Catalonia and the Basque Country were given the right to establish their own police forces, to operate in the place of the Spanish National Police and the *Guardia Civil*. The Basques established the *Ertzainta*, and Catalonia created the *Mossos*. While this right has since been extended to all 17 *comunidades*, only Madrid, the Canary Islands, and Navarre (which may be considered to be a Basque region but is administratively separated from the Basque Country proper) have created their own forces.

³⁵ Based in Catalonia, the TSJC is actually a national court, administered by the Spanish government.

the same police forces had sought to tear out the entire Catalan identity from its roots. Soon throngs of demonstrators had formed outside the buildings being searched by Spanish police to show their disapproval of what they viewed as Spanish aggression. While Madrid had hoped to destabilize the referendum-planning, instead all they succeeded in doing was further mobilizing the people of Catalonia against them, spurring protests across the region as well as a solidarity movement among civil society organizations. This process is charted in Figure 3.3 below.

Figure 3.3 – Theoretical Map of the 2017 Referendum



When the *Guardia Civil* entered the Catalan Department of the Economy, roughly 40,000 protesters blocked off the street in front of the building, also barricading the police squad in charge of the raid inside of the building. The Mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, urged all citizens to take to the streets in protest, and representatives of Podem, ERC, and PDeCAT to the Spanish national congress walked out in protest of the police crackdown. Trapped in the economics ministry, the *Guardia Civil* requested support from the *Mossos*, but the Catalan police responded that because they had received no advanced notice of any activities by either

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Guardia Civil or National Police units in their jurisdiction they were unable to spare any resources.

The crowd outside the ministry grew increasingly restless, and the exact sequencing of the events to follow is at the heart of ongoing trials in Madrid at the time of this writing. Spanish officials claim that leaders from civil activist groups Omnium Cultural and the Catalan National Congress (ANC) instructed civilians to barricade the officers in the building and attempted to incite the crowd to violence. However, the jailed leaders of these groups, Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sanchez i Picanyol, respectively, as well as others present at the demonstration, claim that “the Jordis” urged the crowd to move along, in order to avoid the astronomical fines which could be charged if the *Guardia Civil* ruled them to be holding an unauthorized demonstration. ANC and Omnium representatives also assisted police forces in maintaining a corridor through the crowd for the *Guardia Civil* to evacuate the building, though the *Guardia Civil* declined to use this route as the cars they had come in were not clear of protesters.³⁶ Legal representation for Cuixart and Sanchez have submitted a video from the protest to be screened during their trial on charges of sedition, which clearly shows the Jordis asking protesters to disperse. Similarly, the highest-ranking officials in the *Mossos* at both regional and Barcelona municipal levels were arrested on charges of sedition for refusing to assist the national police, though both officials maintain that such support was impossible without any advance notice, especially given that the *Mossos* have primary jurisdiction over Catalonia.

Operation Anubis continued after the altercation outside the economics ministry, though at that point much of Catalan civil society came out in opposition to the Spanish police crackdown, including all of the major universities, professional sports clubs, workers’ and students’ unions, and a plethora of NGOs and professional organizations. Puigdemont took advantage of this unity by declaring the following morning that the referendum would go forward

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³⁶ The *Guardia Civil* would later claim over €135,000 in damages caused to these 3 vehicles.

in the face of Spanish aggression. The situation escalated from there; the stevedores unions in Barcelona and Tarragona voted to refuse to work on the ships carrying Spanish police reinforcements, police raids continued, and protests grew. Spain faced international outrage at their treatment of Catalonia, having finally violated their most credible commitments regarding minority rights and treatment.

On 1 October, with the referendum date finally upon them, the *Generalitat* had made sure that election materials were present in all polling places, even those in municipalities which had refused to offer logistical support. Several teams of international observers had been invited to supervise the elections. The ad hoc Electoral Commission had been forced to shut down early in the campaign, faced with the threat of fines from Madrid amounting to several thousand euros per day of the campaign, which was an insurmountable obstacle given that no public funds could be used for the referendum. Opinion polls from throughout 2017 reported a roughly even split on the independence question, while a series of polls of self-identified “certain to vote” Catalans reported 60-80% approval³⁷ and suggested a likely turnout of about 60%. However, on the day of the referendum Catalonia was once again rocked by a wave of Spanish police raids. These included the violent obstruction or forced closure of polling places, seizure of voting materials including ballots and ballot boxes, arrests of politicians and activists, and the confiscation of documents, computers, and cell phones from pro-independence organizers.

The results showed over 90% of voters answered affirmatively to the question “Do you want Catalonia to become an independent state in the form of a republic?” though the excitement at these results was mitigated by several irregularities. The *Generalitat* later reported 43% turnout for the referendum, and repeatedly cited Spanish police violence as the reason turnout was not higher. However, the damage was done, the moment had ended, and between

³⁷ Given that many anti-independence and anti-referendum voters planned to boycott the elections on principle, this gap is not surprising. It should be noted, however, that in opinion polls from 2013 up to the 2017 vote approval was overwhelmingly in favor of holding a referendum, though some polls specified a legal or illegal referendum, yielding some spread in the results.

Spanish policing and Catalan irregularities few outside Catalonia considered the results legitimate. ~~The international observers, that the Generalitat had been so sure to invite~~ ruled that the levels of unrest during the election invalidated their results, and many condemned Madrid's reactionism. In the end both Barcelona and Madrid were able to deal critical blows to their opponents; Barcelona demonstrated that Madrid could not stop Catalonia's demand for self-determination, and Madrid ensured that the results of the referendum would be rejected by international observers. Having learned from their lenience following the 2014 referendum, Madrid was out for blood the second time around, and Rajoy's government was especially incensed by the comparisons now flying between their treatment of Catalonia and Franco's.

While the law that had provided for the holding of the referendum had specified that there would be no turnout requirement, many in- and outside of Catalonia were concerned by the prospect of independence being decided by a minority of Catalans. From the outside, it appeared that the *Generalitat* was starting to feel similar concerns. For the first several days after the vote only vague pro-independence platitudes were delivered by Puigdemont, including a speech to the Catalan parliament in which he seemed to declare and then immediately suspend Catalan independence, ostensibly to suspend a Spanish reaction as well. On 11 October Rajoy formally required the *Generalitat* to clarify whether they had declared independence. The lack of clarity coming from Barcelona continued, and Madrid issued a second ultimatum, threatening to dissolve the *Generalitat* should the answer not be a 'no'. Under Article 155 of the 1978 Constitution, the Spanish government has the ability to dissolve any regional government should they fail to fulfill "the obligations imposed upon it by the constitution or other laws, or acts in a way that is seriously prejudicial to the general interest of Spain",³⁸ though until 2017 it had never been used. However, the original drafting of the article

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³⁸ "CONSTITUCIÓN ESPAÑOLA.", 48; Spanish original: "*Si una Comunidad Autónoma no cumpliera las obligaciones que la Constitución u otras leyes le impongan, o actuare de forma que atente gravemente al interés general de España*"

was unclear on what would happen *after* the dissolution of the regional government. The *Generalitat*'s slow response to the threats from Madrid seem to have come in part from disorganization and disagreement among the Catalan parties, but also from a number of strategic considerations.

After the deadline for a Catalan response had passed, and Rajoy had announced that his government would officially begin Article 155 proceedings and seek to dissolve the *Generalitat*, Puigdemont dissolved the Catalan parliament himself and called for snap elections, hoping to stop the nuclear option. Madrid responded by clarifying that no election called by the current Catalan government would halt the invocation of Article 155, and Puigdemont cancelled both the elections he'd called as well as the dissolution of his government. CUP and ERC especially were anxious to hold a vote on a unilateral declaration of independence, which was finally held after two days of debate in parliament, while at the same time the Spanish senate debated implementation of Article 155. Both of these resolutions passed their respective legislatures, in the Catalan case by a margin of 70-10, with most of the opposition absent from the vote due to its probable illegality. Catalan law requires all changes to Catalonia's sovereignty to be approved by a two-thirds majority (90), but Puigdemont announced the vote to be considered legitimate and binding. This eleventh-hour attempt to legitimate the unofficial referendum into a usable political tool tracks with Ganguly's windows of opportunity in the face of growing resistance from Madrid.

With no clear course of action dictated by the constitution, and an ongoing PR nightmare stemming from the police violence in Catalonia, Madrid announced that they would call snap elections in Catalonia. On 30 October, Spanish courts issued warrants for 14 leading Catalan officials, only to find that Puigdemont had fled to Belgium, along with a handful of his cabinet, to

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evade the arrest warrants.³⁹ Most of the remaining accused were held prior to the determination of their exact charges and without bail, both before and after giving testimony.

In December, following nearly two months of direct rule from Madrid administered by Rajoy's Deputy Prime Minister, Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, regional elections were held to seat a new autonomous government. In the 2017 elections, the independence monolith of JxCat splintered under the weight of the Crisis. What had become clear to the real independence hardliners was that when push came to shove PDeCAT/CDC did not have the stomach to act as quickly and decisively as the more radical groups. Instead, these reformed into a coalition of ERC, CatSi, DC, and Mes. At the same time, Puigdemont's PDeCAT/CDC machine re-branded itself as Junts pel Catalonia (Together for Catalonia, JxCat). Puigdemont did not want to run a solely PDeCAT election list, and instead brought a number of independents and activists to round out the "new" party. The pro-independence parties came away with 70 seats total (ERC-CatSi: 32, JxCat: 34, CUP: 4; full results in Appendix B), holding a slightly narrower majority than before but demonstrating that a combined 46.5% of the voters still supported independence.⁴⁰

While the ultimate ending to the 2017 crisis in Catalonia has yet to be written, it is certain that the events of late 2017 have dramatically affected independence sentiments in Catalonia. While it is unclear exactly what percentage of Catalans actually want independence from Spain, it is abundantly clear that Rajoy's heavy-handed tactics backfired dramatically. Since Rajoy and his PP have been replaced by a PSOE government led by Pedro Sanchez, there has been a much more conciliatory relationship between Barcelona and Madrid, but tensions are still high, with Vox becoming the first fascist party since 1936 to earn seats in the *Congreso de los Diputados* in the 2019 national elections, running on a platform that included harsh anti-

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³⁹ Puigdemont is (at the time of this writing) still in Brussels in a self-imposed exile, though he is also currently being tried *in absentia* in Madrid for crimes including rebellion and sedition.

⁴⁰ However, given the 79% turnout in the regional elections, that 46.5% represented more votes than had been cast for independence in the October referendum.

autonomy and anti-independence sentiments. Most shocking of all, Vox was even able to secure a foothold *in Catalonia*, demonstrating that the endless push for independence has alienated a not-insignificant portion of Catalans.

Table 3.4 – Ethnic Bargaining Model (Chapter Three)

	Repressive Majority	Disapproving Majority	Accommodationist Majority
Strong Minority	minority increases demands and government cracks down - 2017 Referendum	minority increases demands and government refuses to meet them, but issues only rhetorical or symbolic response - 2014 Referendum	minority increases demands and government backs down and grants concessions
Weak Minority	minority de-escalates demands and government persecutes them anyway	minority de-escalates demands and the situation remains tense, but calm	minority de-escalates demands and minority and majority coexist peacefully

Conclusions

Through the previous chapters of this thesis I have outlined and analyzed the key points of tension between Barcelona and Madrid since 2003. The analysis of the previous chapters ended with the 2017 Catalan elections, which may be considered a sort of end to the crisis that the 2017 referendum triggered. The more final end is still in the works, however, and earlier this week – in a show of absolute lunacy – several Catalan politicians took their seats in the Spanish parliament, despite fact that these MPs are currently remanded to prison pending the end of their trials for charges ranging from sedition and rebellion to mismanagement of public funds. These proceedings are being treated as the Trial of the Century by both the Spanish and Catalan press. It is unclear whether these MPs will be brought back to sit in on the session when the investiture vote will take place, or in fact for any future sessions of parliament. If they are, it undercuts Madrid's attempt at penalizing them, opening the door to further separatist demands. If they are not, their absence amounts to a diminishment of Catalan representation in Madrid, something the Catalans are unlikely to take lying down. Over the last few years, this conflict has brought both Spain and Catalonia beyond the edge of the map. While most things have returned to normal in Catalonia and the tensions have eased somewhat, neither side seems sure how to deal with the fallout, as the somewhat surreal Trial of the Century playing out in Madrid demonstrates daily.

The entire process since Madrid ruled that it would implement Article 155 proceedings has been a fairly surreal affair; it can be difficult to tell in the case of Catalonia and Spain exactly which rules count, and exactly how much. The politicians on trial currently are there for essentially the same reasons that Artur Mas received only a 13-month ban on serving in public office and a fine. But these 2017 organizers are now at the center of a monumental symbolic battle, and charges like sedition and rebellion can carry some of the most severe prison terms allowed under Spanish law. Madrid did not have an actual contingency plan in place for an

escalation of demands growing into an assertion of independence, however unclear. Similarly, it doesn't appear that the *Generalitat* had an agreed-upon plan for the aftermath of the referendum. Instead, Puigdemont spent the better part of a month making vague statements including the words declaration and independence but refusing to organize them into a declarative statement that would answer the question repeatedly posed by Madrid of whether they were declaring independence.

It is fitting that the independence vote in the *Generalitat* and the Article 155 vote in the *Cortes Generales* took place at the same time; in both Barcelona and Madrid the highest levels of two governments were trying to negotiate an unexpected turn of events. The Spanish had never seemed to consider what would happen if they actually needed to implement Article 155, and the punishment they finally handed down was essentially to call Catalan elections which the Catalan President had already called. The symbolic and ontological injury of a few weeks under direct rule from Madrid was certainly a major blow to the Catalan independence movement, but there were no long-term ramifications outside of whatever sentences will eventually be ordered for the 2017 organizers.

Clearly Spanish regime responses towards Catalan demands for autonomy or independence are shaped by several factors, ranging from relative positioning of the two entities to the ghosts of the Franco Regime that still haunt all corners of Spain. Overall, Spain's responses are frequently symbolic or rhetorical, such as removing Artur Mas from office after his term had ended or rejecting the legal status of the word "nation" in the revisions to the Catalan Statute of Autonomy. These responses seem targeted to de-escalate Catalan demands without providing a concessions or substantively punitive actions. While these actions may seem relatively low-risk from Madrid, they have frequently become focal points of the pro-independence movement in Catalonia. Essentially, Madrid consistently increases resentments by providing new, low-level grievances which become magnified in the public consciousness as they are compared and connected to Catalonia's more serious historical grievances through

clever usage of Catalonia's myth-symbol complex. At the same time, these minor indignities are clearly not actual deterrents. Instead, the Catalan independence movement grew dramatically between 2010 and 2017, in the face of minor victories scored by Madrid against Barcelona. While these actions may otherwise act as signals that Madrid is not looking to make accommodations, when signals are used as responses to actual demands, they lose their effectiveness.

Similarly, the millennium of historical grievances that Catalonia holds against Spain are unlikely to be erased or overcome without substantial reforms to the Spanish government; the Catalan case for independence is centered in part on the assertion that Spanish corruption and authoritarian tendencies make the current relationship untenable. This historical rage is deployed in most of the pro-independence argumentation, which leans heavily on past abuses by the Spanish state, including tying present disagreements to the skeletons still lurking in Spain's closets. The entirely unresolved regime era will continue to drive a wedge between Madrid and all of the minority communities of Spain until there is a process of acknowledgement at least of the crimes of the regime, though the Spanish political parties remain divided on the issue. PP, unsurprisingly, is consistently against reopening the discussion of crimes committed during the Civil War and the dictatorship that followed. Spain has the most unearthed mass graves of any country in the world but Cambodia,⁴¹ and at the most basic level that's a fair sign that the era of Catalan separatism is not over.

⁴¹ According to the Spanish government, there are roughly 2,000 mass graves still intact in Spain, while NGOs active in Cambodia (specifically the Documentation Center of Cambodia) say there are roughly 20,000 mass graves still sealed, expected to contain roughly 1.3 million people in total. Spain's place on the list may be threatened as other countries uncover more mass graves, as this number counts only known but unopened graves.

Evaluation of Theories

Throughout this paper we have considered the independent variables of minority leverage, grievance, and perceptions of change in Catalan autonomy. The chart below shows the broad strokes of how the Catalan autonomy movement radicalized into an independence movement, and in doing so points to some interesting possible answers to the question of why. The initial spark of the movement's escalation was the battle to amend the Catalan Statute of Autonomy, inspired by an ambitious Basque attempt to do that same. Catalonia was not alone in this confrontation with Madrid; several *comunidades* similarly attempted to increase their own autonomous rights, and Madrid struck down parts of most of them. While the Catalans may have considered this safety in numbers as a sign of leverage over Madrid, though there is no sign of Madrid seeing it that way. Instead, they reacted by treating all of the regions the way they had Basque Country; by maintaining the constitutional limits on their autonomy.

The Catalan people, for their part, viewed these limits as illegitimate. It is a major issue in a state as decentralized as Spain when regions begin to challenge the primacy of the central government, but Madrid seems to still be unsure how to handle challenges as a liberal democracy and a member of the European Union. While their international position in organizations like the EU provide Spain's minority populations with a credible commitment that Spain will avoid using violent measures against them, Madrid repeatedly fails to make the consequences of separatist demands clear. Instead, the Catalans have seemed to employ a policy of pushing against Madrid, little by little, to see where their red line would be on the issue of autonomy and independence.

From a theoretical standpoint, these escalating confrontations show us first that ethnic bargaining (done properly) requires better signaling, more credible commitments, and more willing negotiations than either Madrid or Barcelona has seemed ready to commit to in recent years. It is difficult to assess the role of minority leverage since it is frequently difficult to attribute

clear expectations or intentions on either side of the conflict. This is doubly true when considering that at key junctures neither side seemed entirely certain of what their next move would be. Furthermore, with neither side willing to make reasonable concessions, the utility of negotiations drops to effectively zero. The final findings from the model borrowed from Jenne (shown in Table 4.2 below) demonstrate two things; first, that Spain's reactions to Catalan demands overall did not change until the escalation to police violence directly before and during the 2017 referendum, and second, that the perceived relative strength of Spain and Catalonia has not changed substantially over recent years.

The Catalan case provides several points to build on Ted Allen Gurr's theory of mobilization as a result of grievances. Primarily, while Gurr found that the role of grievance drops off once mobilization begins, replaced by such other factors as "group organization, leadership, and state response"⁴², in the Catalan case it appears that grievances can be cumulative. The feelings of victimization in response to decisions made in Madrid appear to stack over time, rather than fading into a less reactionary movement. This could be a result of the relatively short duration of the case as analyzed in this thesis, but it appears that additional perceived wrongs serve to push the radicalized members of the movement - including some proportion of Catalonia's leading politicians - further towards the extremes. Instead of de-escalating demands in the face of firm refusals from Madrid, the Catalans escalated dramatically following the failed 2012 talks on fiscal autonomy.

Another trend that becomes clear from analyzing the Catalan case is that increased autonomy for a minority region is likely to lead to increased demands for autonomy, both by strengthening their bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the state and by acting as a focal point for further mobilization. In the Catalan case it also becomes clear that where these demands are consistently denied or frustrated by the state, demands for autonomy are likely to escalate to

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⁴² Gurr, 189

demands for independence. This may be read as an extension of Gurr's argument, in which denial of further autonomy acts as a source of grievance, but it can also be viewed as a corollary to Siroky & Cuffe's theory. These authors group cases in terms of autonomous status, drawing a line between cases of autonomy and cases of *lost* autonomy, but in the Catalan case the refusal of Madrid to allow Catalonia to expand its autonomous rights had the same effect on radicalizing the movement that Siroky & Cuffe found in cases of lost autonomy.

Potentially as a result of either grievance or frustrated autonomous desires, we see another alarming trend in the Catalan case. This is the way in which the limiting of legal options for increased autonomy or independence by Madrid served to radicalize the Catalan movement at an alarming speed. While it is impossible to know how things could have ended differently, it is extremely likely that the 2017 referendum would have had a wildly different outcome without the interference of Spanish police. Without the violence and protests that preceded the 2017 referendum, it is very likely that the selectorate would have been much less supportive of independence, just as it is possible that without the considerable threat of Article 155 Puigdemont may not have organized a parliamentary vote on independence. Most importantly, a majority of Catalan voters declined to participate in either referendum, largely because they were neither official nor binding, meaning that we won't truly know whether a majority of Catalans favor independence unless Spain allows a legitimate vote.

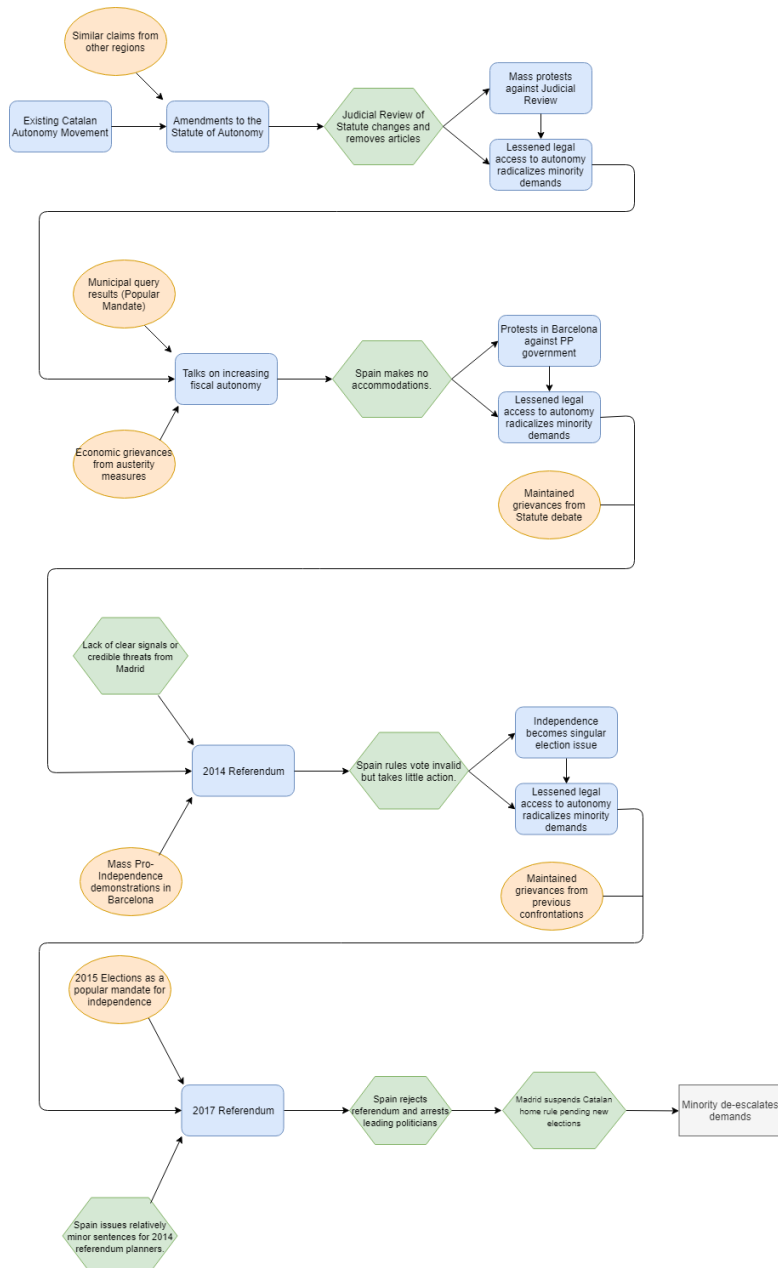
Instead, as Madrid further limited the *Generalitat's* options, they increased the stakes of pro-independence activity, leading the Catalan government to double down and issue sweeping decrees, including the announcement in 2014 that the Spanish Constitutional Court would no longer be considered a legitimate organ, or any of Puigdemont's haphazard declarations of independence following the 2017 referendum. The combination of Spain's attempts to frustrate increased demands, combined with the rapidly-increasing mobilization of the Catalan people, dramatically reduced the utility of going through the existing legal framework for the *Generalitat*,

ultimately leading them to more and more dramatic pushbacks against Madrid and the Spanish constitution.

Table 4.1 – Ethnic Bargaining - Conclusions

	Repressive Majority	Disapproving Majority	Accommodationist Majority
Strong Minority	minority increases demands and government cracks down - 2017 Referendum	minority increases demands and government refuses to meet them, but issues only rhetorical or symbolic response - Statute of Autonomy - Talks on increasing fiscal autonomy - 2014 Referendum	minority increases demands and government backs down and grants concessions
Weak Minority	minority de-escalates demands and government persecutes them anyway	minority de-escalates demands and the situation remains tense, but calm	minority de-escalates demands and minority and majority coexist peacefully

Figure 4.1 – Full Case Map



Final Thoughts

Like a planet knocked from its orbit but still dragging along a moon, Spain and Catalonia circle around each other, hurtling towards nothing but locked into a relationship that seems untenable and destined to end in a fiery collision. At the same time, Catalonia's position in Spain has seemed untenable at many stages of their parallel histories, and yet in the grand scheme of things usually relatively little changes. The battle with Madrid (complete with both heroic victories and tragic defeats) is central to the Catalan identity and conception of self, just as the unity of Spain is central to *Castellanos*. These conflicting ontological needs cannot be satisfied by the secession of Catalonia, and in fact the Catalans may find themselves unmoored if they suddenly lost their ancient foil. Pragmatic concerns such as governance and EU membership aside, the Catalans and *Castellanos* need each other in a strange and unhealthy way.

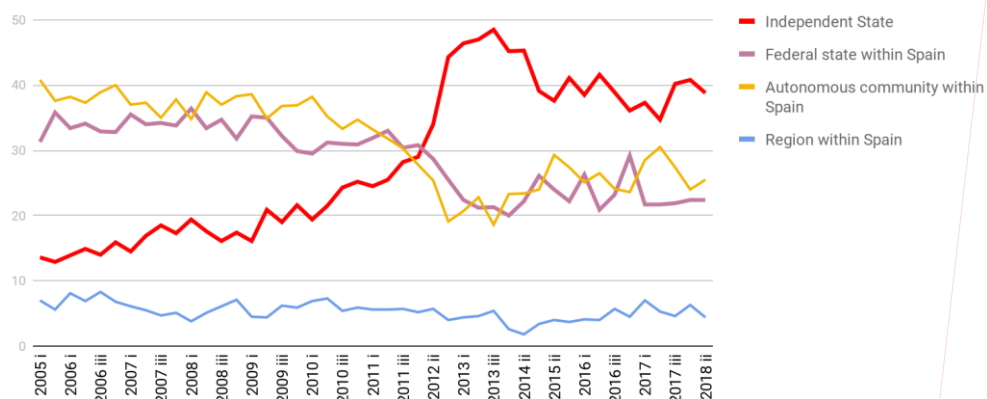
It can be difficult to say if the masses or the political elites truly propel the Catalan independence movement; instead it appears the two leapfrog each other, with the initial popular mobilization coming from the judicial review of the amended Statute though no clear indicator that that was the *Generalitat's* intended outcome when drafting the amendments. As the series of confrontations continued, so did the size and frequency of pro-independence demonstrations in Catalonia, suggesting that the political elites chased the selectorate towards separatism. This seems especially true in the final conversion of CiU to a pro-independence party, following the largest pro-independence rally in Catalan history.

The Spanish government, for their part, lost most of the pages to their playbook during the transition to democracy in the early 80s. Suddenly the hardline tactics that had kept the Catalans in line were no longer available under their new auspices as a Western liberal democracy and new measures had to be found. As discussed above, the emergent solution of symbolic and rhetorical signaling as responses to increasing demands has proven

unsuccessful, but this may represent a democratization learning curve; symbolic actions are too little, the 2017 police intervention was much too harsh, and hopefully Sanchez's socialist government will be able to find a happy medium between the two. It seems likely that a PSOE government will approach Catalonia with a softer touch than their PP counterparts, but it does not seem as though either side is ready to have a useful and productive dialogue on the independence question, or indeed any of the grievances that Catalans hold on to. The de-escalation of Catalan demands following the 2017-18 crisis point does not seem likely to be permanent, and the next time Catalonia challenges Madrid, Madrid will respond with real rather than symbolic measures, capable of acting as an actual deterrent to the Catalan independence movement. Or let them go.

Appendix A – Public Opinion Results: CEO Barometre Data

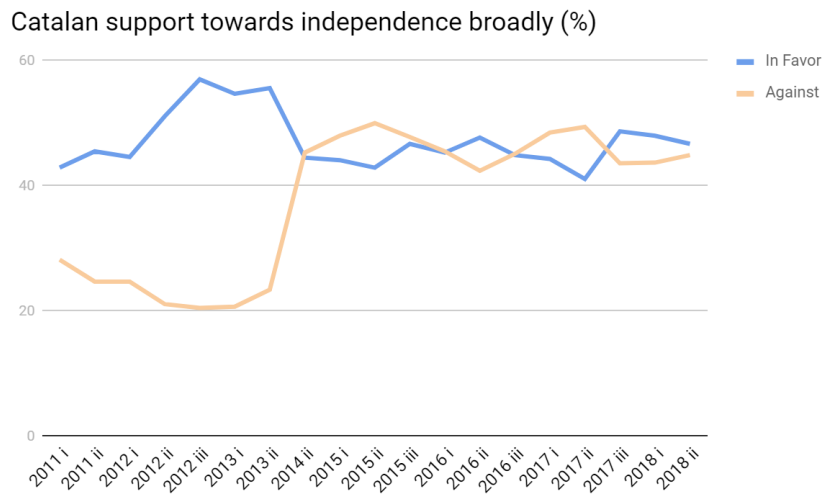
"What kind of political entity should Catalonia be with respect to Spain?" (%)



Commented [13]: new home???

This chart shows the results of the *Generalitat's Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió* (Centre for Opinion Studies, CEO) data for most of the period covered by this chapter, from June 2005 to mid-2018. CEO conducts this research through personal interviews with a statistically-appropriate sample of Spanish citizens resident in Catalonia. CEO also has statistics on overall approval of independence in the abstract (i.e. not alongside other options for Catalonia's relationship with Spain), and these mark approval higher, peaking above 50% in 2012, but dropping below back into the 40s as the 2014 referendum approached. These are charted below, though the above table seems a more legitimate measure of the popular support for an independent Catalan state than the question of whether Catalans are in favor of the concept of independence. Note: the abstract independence surveys began only after CEO was reorganized under the direct administration of the *Generalitat*.⁴³

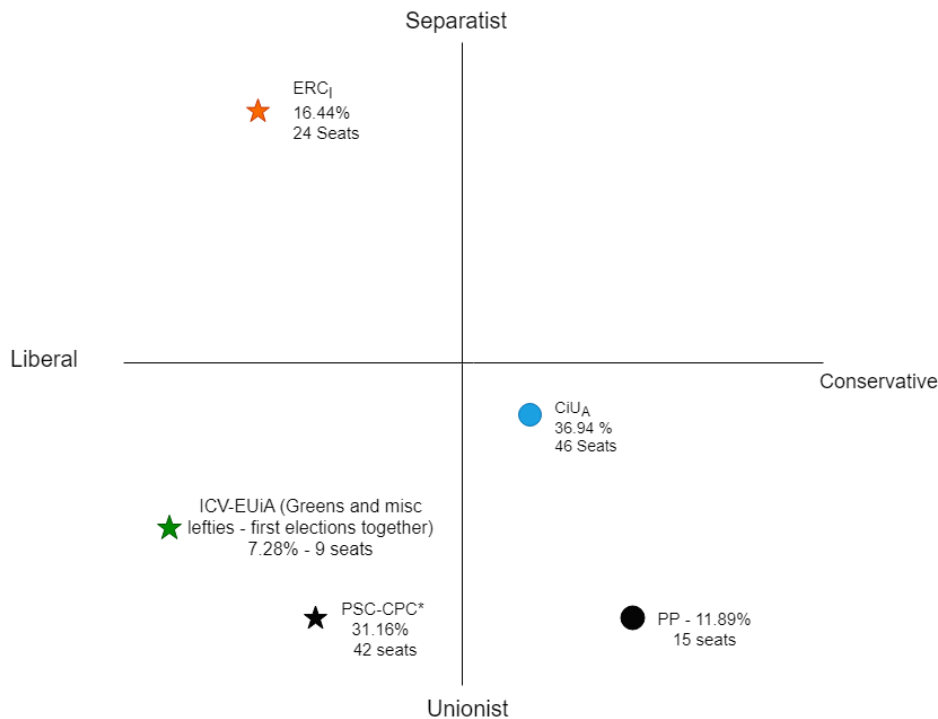
⁴³ Citation information for the full set of Barometre reports is in the Statistical Sources section of the Bibliography of this thesis.



Note: In early 2014, this question was replaced by the official questions of the unofficial referendum. In the two surveys done with these questions, the following results were returned.

Survey Series	Yes/Yes	Yes/No	No	Abstain	Other	Abstain/No answer
2014 i	47.1	8.6	19.3	11.1	2.7	11.2
2014 ii	49.4	12.6	19.7	6.9	6.2	3.3

Appendix B – Catalan Regional Election Results, 2003-2017



2003 Catalan Regional Elections (7th Generalitat)

President - Pasqual Maragall (PSC-CPC)

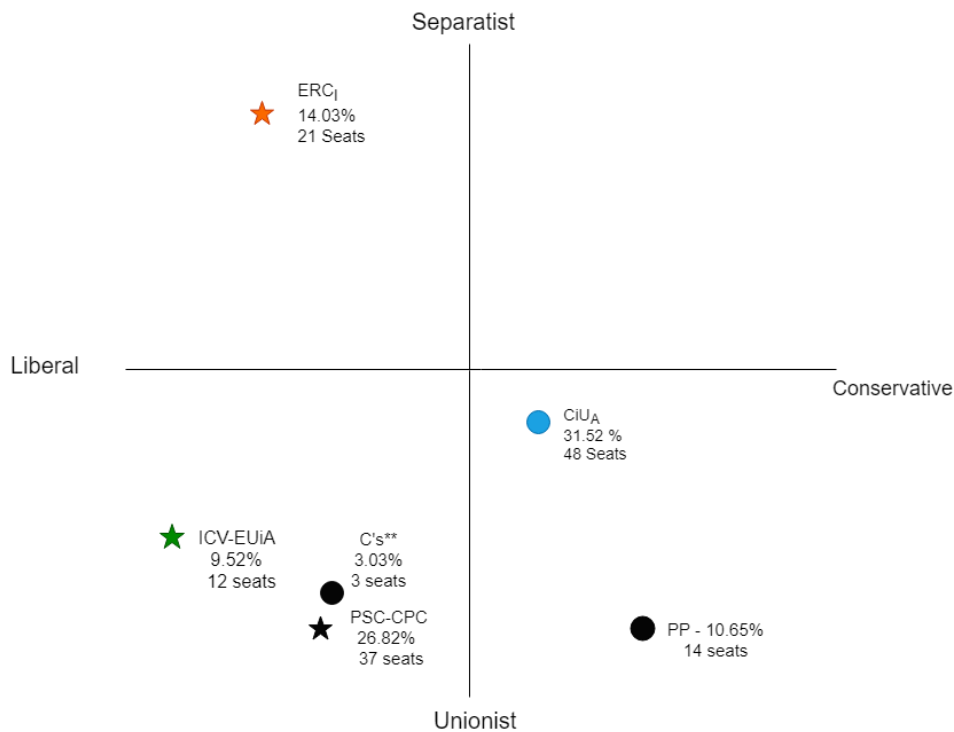
Turnout - 62.5%

Leading coalition - 68/135 seats

* I coded PSC-CpC as Spanish because their commitments to PSOE (PSC is in fact PSC-PSOE) keep them pro-union. There are other parties and mergers of pro-independence socialists but they haven't been as successful since ERC (the main leftist Catalan party) is pretty into socialism too, and it's hard for small parties to compete with ERC or PSC-PSOE. CPC (Citizens for Change) is a republican and federalist party generally. Big on autonomy, definitely not willing to commit to separatism.

KEY:

- Spanish parties are represented with a black dot
- Catalan regional parties are represented with a dot in their party color
- Members of the governing coalition are denoted with a star
- "Seats" refers to seats in the *Generalitat*, the Catalan regional parliament
- Spanish parties may be assumed to be unionist in all cases. Catalan parties are marked based on their preference for Independence, Autonomy, or Self-determination, where applicable.



2006* Catalan Regional Elections

(8th Generalitat)

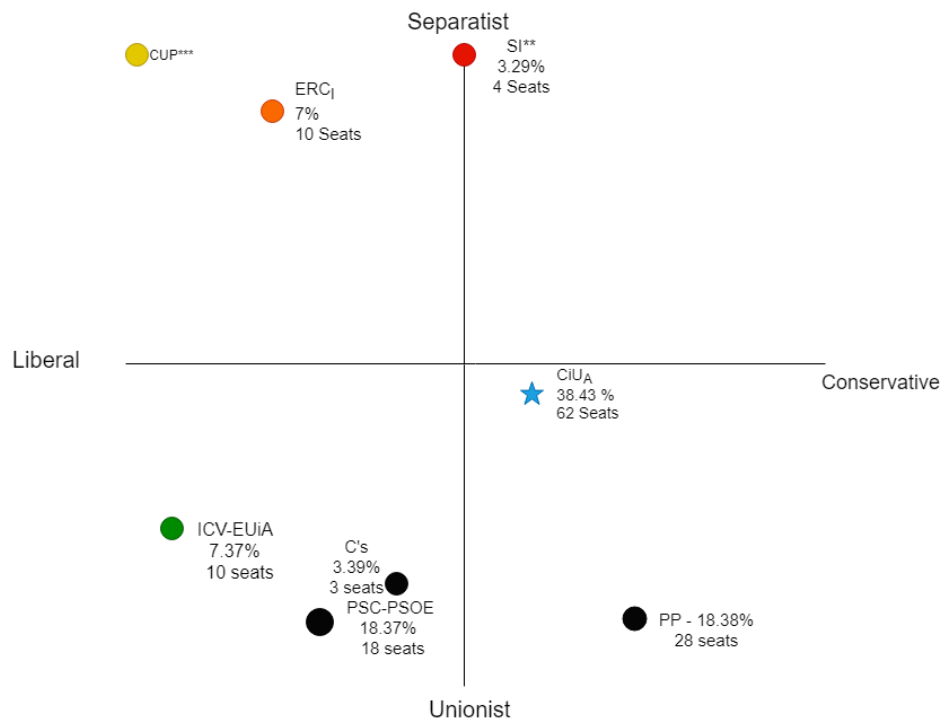
President - Jose Montilla (PSC-CPC)
 Turnout - 56%
 Leading coalition - 70/135 seats

*Called roughly a year early because of the Statute of Autonomy legal battle with Madrid. Held five months after a referendum on substantial reforms to the Statute of Autonomy. Results of referendum: Yes: 78.07% / No: 21.93% // Turnout: 48.85%

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** C's (Party of the Citizenry) Founded in Catalonia in 2006, but is in fact a Spanish nationalist/unionist party. It's unclear what exactly they want/believe in since they've never been in power and they're pretty vague except their slogan: "Catalonia is my homeland, Spain is my country, and Europe is our future."



2010* Catalan Regional Elections (9th Generalitat)

President - Artur Mas (CiU)

Turnout - 58.8%

Leading coalition - 62/135 seats ("Variable Geometry" years, CiU governed from the minority since no other government was really mathematically feasible)

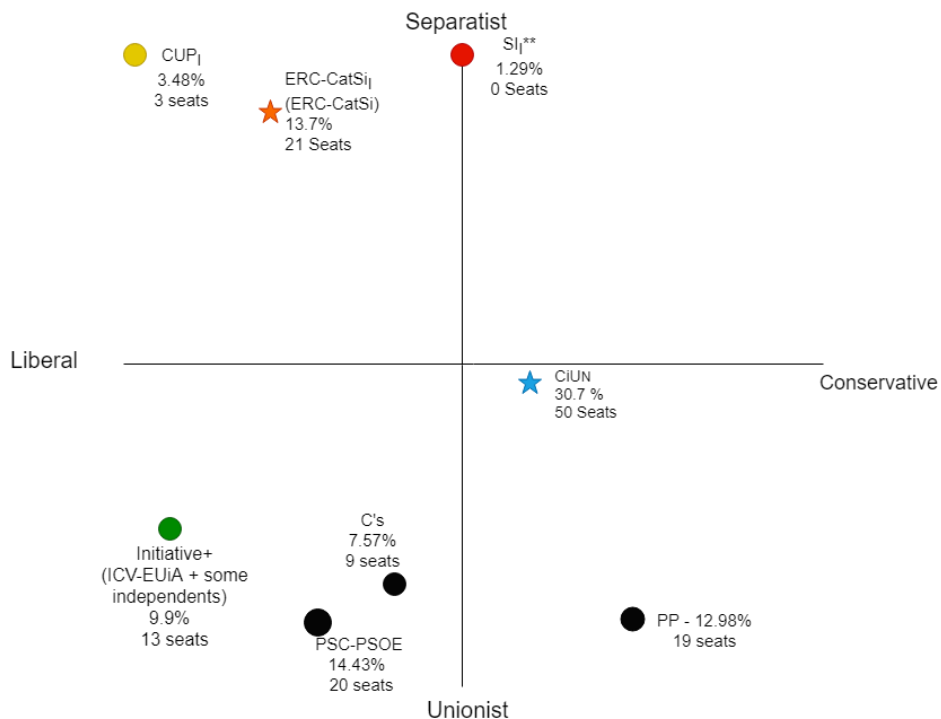
*Elections were not called early, but were five months after the Spanish Supreme Court struck down significant parts of the new Statute of Autonomy, leading to street protests in Catalonia, and the first real popular support for an independence referendum. Additionally, municipalities had held a series of non-binding independence votes of their own (see right).

**SI (Catalan Solidarity for Independence) has no political ideology aside from Catalan independence. They formed in July 2010, four months prior to the elections, as part of the municipal query grassroots movement.

***CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy) did not enter elections until 2012, but they were integral in organizing the municipal queries.

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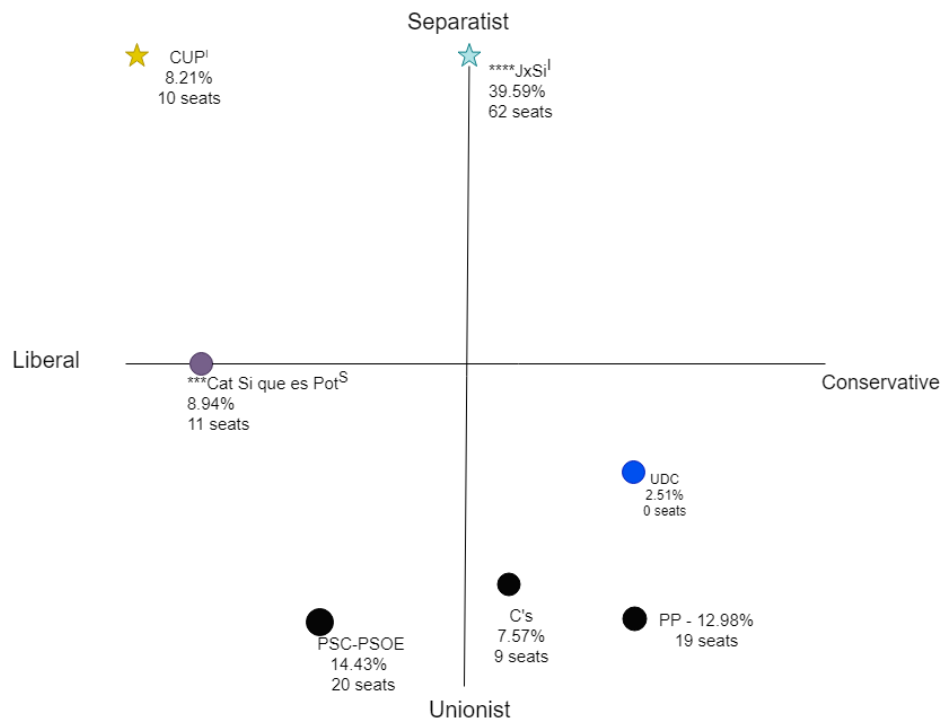


2012* Catalan Regional Elections (10th Generalitat)

President - Artur Mas (CiU)
Turnout - 67.8%
Leading coalition - 71/135 seats

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2015* Catalan Regional Elections (11th Generalitat)

President - Carles Puigdemont (CDC)
Turnout - 75%
Leading coalition - **70/135 seats

*Called early in the aftermath of the 2014 (non-binding) referendum and Spain's legal challenge of both the vote and the Generalitat's response to it. Artur Mas instructed the people of Catalonia to treat the elections as a symbolic plebiscite on the independence issue and created JxSi as a big tent, pro-independence movement. This is also the first time ever that Convergence and Union ran as separate parties, though it's unclear when exactly Convergence (CDC) became PdeCAT.

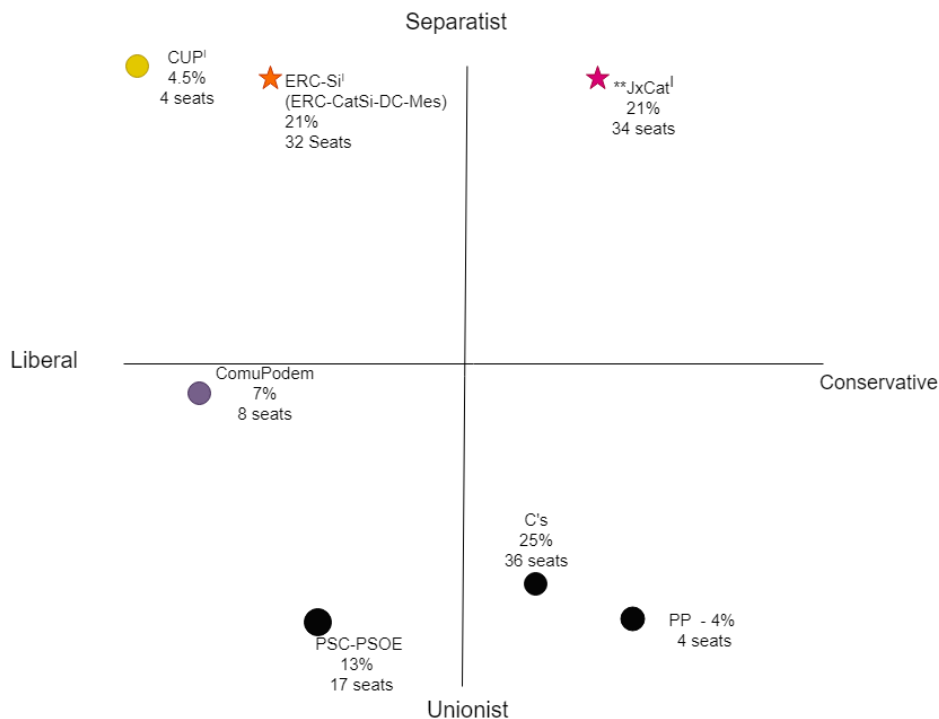
**While the governing coalition represented 72 seats, 2 of the CUP members abstained from the final investiture vote. The other 8 CUP reps voted yes.

*** (Catalonia Yes We Can) A collection of more moderate voices in the independence debate, including Podemos, ICV, EUiA, and Equo.

**** (Together for Yes) a who's who of independence parties, activists, civil movements, etc. A-list included: CDC/PdeCat, ERC, DC, Mes, and many independents.

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2017* Catalan Regional Elections (12th Generalitat)

President - Quim Torra (Ind)
Turnout - 79.1%
Leading coalition - 66/135 seats

*Called early in the aftermath of the 2017 independence referendum, especially since President Carles Puigdemont fled to Brussels to avoid an arrest warrant and many of the pro-independence activists and politicians were imprisoned in Madrid. The 2017 elections ended the brief period of Spanish direct rule following the dissolution of the Catalan government by Madrid under article 155 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution.

**JxCat was formed by Puigdemont when it became clear that no other parties would run on a ballot with PdeCAT. It's essentially the same CDC/PdeCAT crew but with a lot of civil society leaders thrown into their lists too, because Puigdemont didn't want to run a fully PdeCAT list.

KEY:

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Statistical Sources

Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, the Center for Opinion Studies, run by the *Generalitat* of Catalonia, produces Barometer reports several times per year on a variety of subjects, frequently including independence and self-determination. All Barometer reports dating back to 2004 may be found at the following:

- “Baròmetre.” Centre D'Estudis D'Opinió, Generalitat De Catalunya, ceo.gencat.cat/ca/barometre/.