

Independence Referendums

An Analysis of Central Government Decision-Making

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Chapter 1

Introduction

How does a new country get created? Five of the six to come into existence since 1993 (Eritrea, Timor-Leste, Montenegro, Serbia¹, and South Sudan) achieved their independence following a referendum.² An independence referendum is a vote held by citizens in a territory on the question of whether their nation should break away from their current country (also known as the common-state) and form a new sovereign state. In the autumn of 2014, the nations of Catalonia and Scotland, hoped to join this cohort of newly independent states and held their own independence referendums. The United Kingdom government agreed to allow the vote to take place and worked closely with the Scottish secessionists to ensure the process ran smoothly. The central government in Spain, however, refused to recognize the right to hold a referendum in Catalonia and declared it illegal.³ So simply demanding an independence referendum does not guarantee that the results will be recognized by the leaders of the common-state. This thesis will seek to shine a light on the factors that influence central government behavior when faced with demands to hold a referendum. It asks why central governments in some states allow national-secession campaigns to conduct independence referendums—and why other central governments do not.

Puzzle and Significance

Indeed, why do central governments ever allow independence referendums to be held? Even in cases where polling suggests the result will be a vote against independence, there is always a chance that the outcome will be in favor of secession. By allowing a legal independence referendum to take place,

¹ Serbia did not hold its own independence referendum—but emerged from the dissolved Union of Serbia and Montenegro after Montenegro voted to secede in 2006.

² Connell 1998, 41; Dobbins, Miller, Pezard, Chivvis, Taylor, Crane, Trenkov-Wermuth, & Mengistu. 2013, 130; Oklopčić 2012, 23; Guéhenno 2015, 170

³ Dearden 2017

central governments are voluntarily risking the territorial integrity of their state for apparently little in return. This implies that central governments face constraints which push them reluctantly into allowing such a vote to take place. Otherwise we would assume no independence referendums would ever be held.

This is an important question because independence referendums are intrinsically tied to the creation of new sovereign states. The list of cases of newly independent states we saw in the beginning of this chapter is not unique. Throughout the 20th century, most new states used an independence referendum as part of the secession process.⁴ This is particularly true since the end of World War II, which ushered in a new global consensus on the rights of peoples to national self-determination.⁵ Although these rights explicitly relate to decolonization cases, the same logic holds for non-colonial cases as well (using democratic means to ascertain the will of a people regarding independence). We should also try to understand when these referendums take place because they are momentous events in a country's history. They can either lead to a peaceful outcome in which ethnonational issues are put to rest or can increase the salience of ethnic division and make conflicts worse.⁶

To better understand the creation of new states requires a fuller understanding of what role the central government plays. On the surface it is counter-intuitive to expect any central government to willingly risk the loss of a portion of its territory to a national-secession campaign. This is because, according to international law, a central government reserves the right to grant or deny the holding of an independence referendum within its borders.⁷ Except in extreme cases, where a central government is blatantly trampling on the rights of a certain group of its citizens, would the international community step in to impose an independence referendum. As we will see, however, this happens rarely. Central governments, therefore, are typically the gatekeepers of secession—and the path to secession is usually by way of an independence referendum. Studying the motivations of central governments in allowing or prohibiting these referendums is important for illuminating the process of secession as a whole.

⁴ Qvortrup 2014, 48.

⁵ Article 1 of the 1945 Charter of the United Nations describes the “self-determination of peoples” to be one of the body's guiding principles.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷ Radan 2012, 12.

I would like to briefly clarify some terminology used in this thesis. I use the term *nation* to describe a group of people who inhabit a particular territory and share some form of common identity (ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic). A *national-secession campaign* is a political movement which seeks independence for the people in its national group.⁸ A nation may or may not be in control of its own *common-state*. A common-state is the political jurisdiction with recognition from the international community. The *central government* refers to the people and institutions which govern the common-state and will often be referred to in shorthand by a state's capital city in this thesis.

Options of Central Governments

In order to examine the decision-making process of central governments, it is important to clarify what options they have in these scenarios. When faced with a demand for an independence referendum by a national-secession campaign, a central government can respond in three ways: acquiesce, ignore, or suppress. Acquiescence means the central government (reluctantly) allows the independence referendum to be held and agrees to view the results as legitimate and binding. Since 1945, there have been 22 cases that fit this criterion. These are examples of legal referendums which either resulted in the formation of new sovereign states—or would have resulted in the formation of new sovereign states had the citizens voted to leave. The most recent example of this response is Scotland in 2014. Other examples include South Sudan (2011), Montenegro (2006), Quebec (1980, 1995), and many former Soviet and former Yugoslavian nations in 1991.

The second way a central government can respond to a demand for an independence referendum is to ignore it. National-secession campaigns may hold their own independence referendum if they possess the means to undertake the process of preparing ballots, running polling stations, and counting the votes afterwards. But in these cases the central government makes it clear that it will not sanction the results. Therefore, even if a nation's population votes to secede, independence is not guaranteed if the central government refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the referendum process. The lack of central

⁸ A more thorough definition of a national-secession campaign is given in Chapter 5

government involvement reduces the efficacy of the results of these sorts of referendums. For example, in 2014 Catalonia held an unsanctioned independence referendum in which 80% of the participants voted to secede.⁹ Yet turnout was low because those who wanted to remain part of Spain boycotted what they saw as an illegal referendum. Other examples of the central government ignoring national-secession campaigns' demands for independence referendums are the Faroe Islands (1946), Iraqi Kurdistan (2005, 2017), and several territories of the former Soviet Union in 1991.

By sending Spanish police into Catalonia in 2017, the central government in Madrid moved in the direction of the third option considered by this thesis. Suppression of independence referendum demands occurs when the central government forcibly puts down any attempt for a vote to be held. This category is the hardest to measure because it is not always obvious when suppression, or simply the threat of suppression, takes place. Unfortunately, we cannot just take all the cases without a legal or illegal referendum and infer suppression occurred. This is because we cannot be sure that all these remaining national-secession campaigns wish to hold a vote on independence. Many of these campaigns know they do not have the popular support needed to win an independence referendum, so they will not demand one from their central government.

Hypotheses

To assess the factors which determine central government behavior, this thesis seeks to test four hypotheses.¹⁰ The first is the democratic-institutions hypothesis. According to this, we should expect democratic central governments to be more willing to accommodate a demand for an independence referendum than non-democratic central governments. The logic for this argument comes from the inclusive norms and political institutions in these states which should make central governments more inclined to deal with secessionist conflict in a democratic way. A referendum, after all, is among the purest forms of democratic expression.

⁹ BBC November 2014.

¹⁰ These will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 2

The second argument is the precedent-setting hypothesis. It predicts that central governments, which fear that allowing one group to hold an independence referendum will lead to similar demands among other groups in the state, will be less willing to permit the first referendum to take place. This is true even if the central government could stomach the idea of a single group leaving. For example, if Spain grants Catalonia the right to hold a referendum, Spain might be worried that soon Galicia and/or the Basque Country will ask for independence referendums as well. The central government in Madrid might be willing to take the risk of Catalanian independence via referendum, but not willing to risk emboldening other ethnonational groups which may lead to further state disintegration. So, as the fear a central government has about setting a precedent for further secession grows, the less likely it will grant an initial demand for an independence referendum.

Third is the international-intervention hypothesis. According to this, central governments that are facing condemnation, sanctions, or direct intervention by the international community because of a conflict with a national-secession campaign, will be more willing to allow that campaign to hold an independence referendum. We see the best evidence for this taking place in the cases of East Timor (1999) and South Sudan (2011). But cases like these are rare. This may be due to foreign central governments' fears of being accused of hypocrisy by domestic secession campaigns. For this reason, states rarely involve themselves in secessionist conflicts in other states on the side of national-secession campaigns.¹¹

The fourth and final argument is the most straightforward. The value-of-territory hypothesis predicts that central governments will be less willing to allow relatively wealthy regions to hold independence referendums. A region's relative wealth can be measured by the income it generates for the central government (mostly through taxation) minus the amount of money it receives in state expenditures (social insurance programs, for example). A region can also have a high economic value for a central government if it contains useful resources such as petroleum reserves. If we view central governments as primarily concerned with increasing their own power and wealth, it makes sense that they would want to

¹¹ Coggins 2015, 36-9.

prevent any chance of their richer regions seceding. A piece of territory can have more value to a central government than simply economic, however. For example, it may have strategic or symbolic value. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, this hypothesis only examines the impact economic value has on a central government's decision-making process.

Literature Review

Relatively few scholars of nationalism and secession have talked explicitly about the motivations of central governments to permit or prohibit independence referendums. But there are a couple whose work have formed the basis for some of the arguments in this thesis. Barbara Walter explores the various motivations central governments have in responding to self-determination movements in her book *Reputation and Civil War* (2009). Instead of independence referendums, however, her dependent variable is the level of accommodation a self-determination movement received. But because a central government granting an independence referendum to a secession campaign is a form of accommodation, her work has been an invaluable starting point. The precedent-setting hypothesis is an adaptation of Walter's theory of central government reputation building. She argues that central governments must build up a strong reputation, and give very little accommodation, as they face an increasing number of secessionist challengers.¹²

A second scholar whose work has helped inform this thesis is Matt Qvortrup. He analyzes independence referendums extensively in *Referendums and Ethnic Conflict* (2014). Qvortrup's analysis focuses primarily on the motivations of secession campaigns for seeking an independence referendum, rather than on the motivations of central governments for allowing one. Because independence referendums never happen if people do not demand them, studying this side of each scenario is necessary for arriving at a comprehensive explanation. Qvortrup also identifies exogenous factors which increase the chance of an independence referendum being held. For example, he finds a link between the frequency of independence referendums and periods of geopolitical upheaval in which there was

¹² Walter 2009, 131

“momentous change to the international system.”¹³ This insight provided valuable control factors which improved the robustness of the statistical analysis in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Research Design and Empirical Strategy

The body of this thesis is comprised of two case studies and a section on statistical analysis. A deep look into the cases of Scotland and Catalonia provide a foundation upon which to tangibly explore the hypotheses made earlier. Both nations share many qualities (population size, GDP per capita, regime type, semi-autonomous political institutions) yet their central governments’ responses when confronted with a demand for an independence referendum were completely opposite. The government in the United Kingdom acquiesced to Scotland’s demands and worked closely with the national-secessionists on how the referendum would take place. Spain, by contrast, declared any independence referendum held by Catalonia to be illegal from the outset. In 2014 Madrid ignored the Catalan referendum, and in 2017, it sent in the national guard in an attempt to forcibly stop a second referendum. Comparing Scotland to Catalonia, two cases which share many similarities, offers us the opportunity to arrive at a better understanding of the factors which influence central government behavior when presented with demands for an independence referendum.

The insights from the qualitative case study chapters are not sufficient on their own. A quantitative statistical analysis is also employed to examine whether my hypotheses affect central governments more broadly. This is done using a time-series cross-section analysis on all national-secession campaign years between 1945 and 2010.¹⁴ To account for the various responses a central government can make to demands for an independence referendum, three dependent variables are tested. The first is whether or not any independence referendum took place in a given year. This outcome represents the central government either acquiescing to or ignoring an independence referendum. But to take a deeper look at central government behavior, I have also included separate analyses to explain legal

¹³ Qvortrup 2014, 56.

¹⁴ Dataset from Philip Roeder 2018

referendums and then illegal referendums. Examining which factors affect the various independence referendums outcomes should offer valuable insight into the specific constraints placed on central governments in these situations.

Argument

In this thesis I will show that, when presented with demands for an independence referendum, central government behavior is driven by both domestic and international constraints. My argument is predicated upon the assumption that central governments are, all else equal, extremely averse to permitting independence referendums to be held. This aversion can be heightened by an increase in the number of other secessionist challengers (the precedent-setting hypothesis) or by a relatively rich region wanting to secede (the value-of-territory hypothesis). But even if these two hypotheses turn out to lack explanatory power, we can still safely assume that central governments are loath to risk the loss of any portion of their territory to secession. Thus, no central government can be expected to grant a referendum demand if it does not feel constrained to do so.

In the domestic sphere, we will see that a few factors involved in the democratic-institutions hypothesis work to constrain central governments. First, I use the fact that the political norms and values of a democratic state can be gleaned by looking at its constitution. I will show that, among democracies, the level of constitutional ambiguity surrounding secession plays a large role in determining whether an independence referendum is held. Constitutions which rigidly outlaw secession give central governments a firm basis upon which to prohibit an independence referendum, whereas more flexible constitutions leave central government without a ready-made excuse. We will see how this constitutional dynamic works more clearly in the case study chapters on Scotland and Catalonia (Chapters 3 and 4).

The second large domestic factor affecting whether an independence referendum is permitted is the nature of a central government's political institutions. States which are weakly institutionalized, and lack complete control over their territory, are constrained by their inability to suppress independence referendums. The prevalence of these sorts of referendums during the breakup on the Soviet Union and

Yugoslavia in 1991 is evidence of this. In other circumstances, a national-secession campaign which controls its own de facto state may hold an independence referendum in an effort to legitimize their claim to that territory. A central government, which is so weak as to have a de facto state within its official borders, will be forced to simply ignore the outcome of these votes. We will see this relationship between weak central governments and independence referendums in the quantitative analysis section (Chapter 5).

Chapter 2

Hypotheses

What is similar about the Faroe Islands in 1946, Armenia in 1991, and South Sudan in 2011? Not very much if we look at variables such as political institutions, regime type, time period, economic prosperity, geography, or culture. And yet they all held referendums on the question of whether to remain part of their respective common-states or whether to become independent sovereign nation-states. National-secession campaigns, like those mentioned, were able to hold only 32 independence referendums from 1945 to 2017.¹⁵ If we assume most national-secessionists want the opportunity to hold their own independence referendum, this number appears low given the fact that there were approximately 171 such campaigns active at various points during this 72-year period.¹⁶ Both the dearth and diversity of cases make the prospect of arriving at a simple, unified theory for explaining the behavior of central governments unlikely.

I focus on four different hypotheses to explain a central government's decision. First is the democratic-institutions hypothesis: according to this argument, central governments that embody democratic ideals and have inclusive political institutions should be more likely to permit independence referendums. Second is the precedent-setting hypothesis, which predicts that when central governments fear granting the demands of one national-secession campaign will spark demands for referendums from other groups in the state, central government will be less likely to grant the initial demand. Third is the international-intervention hypothesis: it predicts that states which are facing foreign condemnation, foreign intervention, or other forms of pressure from the international community will be more likely to permit an independence referendum than those which are not. And finally is the value-of-territory hypothesis: according to this argument, central governments are less likely to permit nations in

¹⁵ The number of independence referendums held in this time period comes from news articles and sources which are explained in greater detail in Chapter 5.

¹⁶ Roeder 2018

economically valuable territories to hold independence referendums. I will discuss each hypothesis in turn and explore how they can help explain whether central governments will either acquiesce, ignore, or suppress demands for an independence referendum.

The Democratic-Institutions Hypothesis

Holding a referendum is among the purest forms of democratic expression. It is an event in which the entire electorate is given the opportunity to vote directly on an important issue facing their nation. There are few questions more consequential than that of a nation's right to self-determination. Which is why many scholars agree that an independence referendum is the best way to ascertain a fair answer.¹⁷ For this reason, it is plausible to expect states which embody values such as democracy and pluralism to be more willing to allow their citizens to hold independence referendums.

Yet not all democracies are made alike. What a central government's constitution has to say about independence referendums creates a wrinkle for the democratic-institutions hypothesis. This is because the question of whether a national-secession campaign can hold a referendum is ultimately a legal decision made by the central government.¹⁸ The only states with constitutions that currently include provisions for when an independence referendum can take place are Ethiopia, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Liechtenstein.¹⁹ Other states, however, can still differ in the extent to which their constitutions could legally accommodate an independence referendum. For example, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Canada, and the United States have constitutions which can theoretically allow for negotiations between the central government and a national-secession campaign for independence.²⁰ Whereas constitutions in countries such as Spain, Italy, and Nigeria explicitly prohibit national-secession by including passages referring to the "indivisible and indissoluble" nature of their state.²¹ Central governments in this latter group of cases possess an easy method for rebuffing secessionist demands.

¹⁷ Radan 2014, 17; Qvortrup 2014, 154; Pavković and Radan 2007, 92

¹⁸ Radan 2014, 15

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Radan 2014, 17-8; Nouméa Accords 1998; Article 58 Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands 1954

²¹ Article 2 Constitution of Spain; Article 5 Constitution of Italy; Article 2 Constitution of Nigeria

Therefore, we should expect a higher likelihood of independence referendums to be held in democratic states whose constitutions offer more flexibility on questions of national self-determination.

Appeals to lofty democratic norms, or to the importance of the legal basis for secession, may be unconvincing to those who view state behavior primarily through the lens of power politics. But many democracies also have practical characteristics which should make the probability of an independence referendum more likely. Regional government jurisdictions within democracies contain political institutions which can help coordinate demands for secession, as well as making the hypothetical transition to independence go smoother. For example, Scotland's semi-autonomous parliament, health services, and police forces mean the UK can confidently expect that a new sovereign northern neighbor would not destabilize the rump state left behind (consisting of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland) via political turmoil. Because regional government jurisdictions under the control of national-secession campaigns can be a powerful factor in motivating the *demands* for an independence referendum, however, we should be cautious when inferring a causal effect on the likelihood of a central government to permit an independence referendum.

The Precedent-Setting Hypothesis

As the number of secessionist challengers in a state rises, its central government should be less willing to permit any one of them to hold an independence referendum. Once one national-secession campaign is granted a referendum, the other groups will clamor loudly for one as well. So even if a central government could live with the possibility of a single region seceding, it does not want to set a precedent which could lead to an unacceptable amount of lost territory. The inspiration for this hypothesis comes from Barbara Walter's *Reputation and Civil War* (2009). She finds that central governments which face many challengers are less willing to accommodate the self-determination demands of any of them in

order to build a tough reputation.²² My thesis will seek to explore whether granting an independence referendum is constrained by a similar logic.

The International-Pressure Hypothesis

If the international community exerts enough pressure on a state to permit an independence referendum to be held, its central government should be more likely to acquiesce. The international community consists of other states and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), such as the United Nations or European Union. NGOs, international media, and international public opinion also play a role—but states and IGOs are the primary actors which can affect central government behavior in this domain.²³ There are many conceivable ways for the international community to pressure a central government into allowing an independence referendum to take place. But in practice, pressure has usually come in the form of economic arm-twisting (East Timor 1999)²⁴ or the imposition of direct peacekeeping forces (South Sudan 2011)²⁵. Extreme measures such as these are generally required to make a central government change from suppressing an independence referendum to acquiescing to it. But lighter forms of international pressure can still affect state behavior. For example, after the global outrage over Spain's police brutality in response to Catalonia's 2017 referendum²⁶, Madrid might reconsider responding in such a heavy-handed manner to future demands for a Catalanian independence referendum.

It is rare, however, for the international community to involve itself in the affairs of another state by siding with a secessionist group. Central governments in these other states may have their own national-secession campaigns to contend with, so offering support to secessionists in a foreign country risks domestic embarrassment. Siding with secessionists over their central government also probably entails antagonizing that state, which could lead to unwanted geopolitical reprisal. The high costs

²² Walter 2009, 131

²³ See Nye 2011 and Gelb 2009. These authors offer competing views on international relations, but both agree on the centrality of states and IGOs.

²⁴ Dobbins et al. 2013, 129

²⁵ Guéhenno 2015, 168

²⁶ Henley and Mason 2017

associated with backing a foreign national-secession campaign's bid for independence means that the international-pressure hypothesis is likely only valid in a few circumstances. First, the targeted state must be geopolitically weak enough that it cannot offer a serious threat of retaliation. And second, the international community must be more-or-less united in their opposition to the targeted central government's human rights abuses, warfare, or genocide towards secessionists. These factors help explain why Indonesia and Sudan were forced into acquiescing to independence referendums in East Timor and South Sudan—but why Kosovo's demands for independence referendums were either ignored or suppressed by Serbia after Russia refused to endorse international intervention in Kosovo in the UN Security Council.²⁷

The Value-of-Territory Hypothesis

According to this hypothesis, central governments are less likely to permit national-secession campaigns in economically valuable territories to hold independence referendums. Central governments may be willing to risk the loss of one of their poorer regions but will suppress any attempts at secession in richer ones. The argument applies to central governments in wealthy industrial democracies as well as to ones in despotic autocracies. Modern democracies should place a high value on regions of its country where taxes outweigh public expenditure. And autocracies may want to hold onto a piece of territory due to the resources the central government can extract from it.

Conversely, the value-of-territory hypothesis predicts that central governments will be more willing to grant independence referendums to secessionists inhabiting poor regions. This is not to say, however, that central governments actually want to jettison these poor regions. While it is plausible to assume central governments want to maximize economic prosperity within their country, doing so at the expense of its territorial integrity might be a step too far. In a world where economic maximization is of supreme importance to central governments, we should expect to see many more independence referendums granted to impoverished regions. Secession by expulsion has occurred only twice since

²⁷ Deimel 2015, 123

1945: Singapore in 1965 and Slovakia in 1993. And in each case the central government was motivated more by wanting to get rid of an inconvenient national-secession campaign than by economic reasons.²⁸ So far central governments have a demonstrably powerful desire to retain the integrity of their borders, even at a financial cost. Because of this, the value-of-territory hypothesis is probably not powerful enough to stand on its own as the primary factor influencing central government behavior, but this thesis will explore whether it may be enough to tip a decision to permit an independence referendum one way or another.

²⁸ Roeder 2018, 46

Chapter 3

Case Study: Scotland

On September 18th, 2014 Scotland held a referendum to decide whether it would become an independent country or remain part of the United Kingdom. The results were 44.7% in favor of independence versus 55.3% opposed to independence. Despite this defeat for the Scottish national-secession campaign, support for independence has remained high in Scotland in the years following the referendum.²⁹ There have even been talks of having another vote on the subject. Due to the fact that most Scots view the European Union favorably, Britain's decision to leave the EU after the 2016 Brexit vote has renewed interest among Scottish nationalists for a second independence referendum.³⁰

The Scottish case deserves its own detailed examination because it is an excellent example of a central government acquiescing to a demand from a national-secession campaign for an independence referendum. The UK government not only permitted the vote to be held and vowed to follow the outcome, but it also worked closely with the Scottish government in figuring out the details and logistical questions of how an independence referendum would take place.³¹ Both sides also understood that the central government in London held the final say on whether a referendum was permitted or not. Throughout the process the UK government frequently affirmed its right to grant or deny the Scottish Parliament the right to hold a referendum.³² Once the Scottish Parliament made a decision in 2011 to pursue a referendum, however, there was never a serious threat that the UK central government would attempt to block the process.

Despite London's willingness to permit Scotland to hold an independence referendum, the majority of political opinion in Britain was strongly in favor of Scotland remaining part of the United Kingdom. The UK government at the time, led by David Cameron's Conservative party, campaigned

²⁹ YouGov 2016

³⁰ Scottish National Party Manifesto 2017

³¹ Mullen 2016, 6

³² "Scotland's Constitutional Future" 2012

vigorously for a ‘No’ vote for independence. The other major statewide political parties in the UK such as Labour and the Liberal Democrats were also in favor of Scotland remaining in the UK. The Scottish case, therefore, illustrates perfectly the guiding puzzle of this thesis. If the political forces within the UK’s central government were so unified in their opposition to Scottish secession, why was Scotland granted the right to hold an independence referendum?

Another reason for examining the 2014 Scottish referendum more closely is to compare it with the independence referendum in Catalonia in the same year. Scotland and Catalonia share many similarities, but their national-secession campaigns’ demands for independence referendums elicited different responses from their central governments. Both nations are part of advanced industrial democratic states in Western Europe which are parliamentary monarchies and have majoritarian voting systems for country-wide elections. The UK and Spain both contain two other national-secession campaigns besides Scotland and Catalonia and secessionist violence had been low in each state in the decades prior to the referendums. Scotland and Catalonia have similar population sizes³³ and per capita GDP.³⁴ And both Scotland and Catalonia have a degree of political autonomy, which includes a regional parliament, albeit under the ultimate authority of a strong central government. Holding all these factors constant, and then examining what makes Scotland and Catalonia different, should help illuminate the reasons why central governments respond differently to demands for independence referendums.

Background on Scottish Nationalism

After 104 years under a common monarch, Scotland and England formally joined together as a single state in 1707 with the Acts of Union.³⁵ Although political issues would be decided in London from then until 1998, Scotland retained a degree of autonomy which included its own church and legal system.³⁶ In 1928 the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) was founded. The SNP led a nascent national-

³³ National Records of Scotland 2017; Statistical Yearbook of Catalonia 2017.

³⁴ The Scottish Government Statistics Bulletin 2012; Regional Accounting of Spain 2011.

³⁵ Minahan 1996, 503

³⁶ Kidd and Petrie 2016, 32

secession campaign but failed to make a substantial impact on Scottish politics during its first several decades of existence. It was not until the 1960's and 1970's that the SNP began to win seats in parliament and Scottish nationalism started to become an important issue in the UK.³⁷

The SNP achieved a major victory in 1998 with the passage of the Scotland Act by the British parliament. This started the process of devolution in Scotland which meant a transfer of powers from the central government in London to the newly created Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. Some proponents of devolution in London believed it would placate Scottish nationalists and stop the SNP by removing what they saw as the party's *raison d'être*.³⁸ To their surprise, increased autonomy only boosted the SNP's support in Scotland. In 2007, the SNP won enough seats to form a minority government in the Scottish Parliament and proved itself to be a party capable of competent governance.³⁹

The Referendum and Aftermath

In 2011 the SNP won a majority of seats in the Scottish Parliament for the first time and promised the Scottish people that the SNP government would hold a referendum on independence within the next few years. Scottish nationalists argued that they possessed the right to hold an independence referendum under the 1998 Scotland Act, regardless of whether the UK government acquiesced to it.⁴⁰ But the right to unilaterally hold an independence referendum was disputed by both the UK central government⁴¹ and by a consensus of experts on international law.⁴² London agreed to permit Scotland to hold the referendum, but only after lengthy consultations with the Scottish government.

The 2012 Edinburgh Agreement between the Scottish Parliament and UK government was the result of these talks and laid out the boundaries of the eventual referendum. First, London required that there be a single question on the final voting ballot: "Should Scotland be an independent country?" with

³⁷ Kidd and Petrie 2016, 33

³⁸ Duerr 2015, 83

³⁹ Mullen 2016, 4

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 6

⁴¹ "Scotland's Constitutional Future" 2012

⁴² Bell 2016, 200; Radan 2014, 12

only a Yes or No response.⁴³ This ruled out the inclusion of other ballot options, such as one for increased Scottish autonomy while remaining in the UK. Secondary options like these have appeared on independence referendums in the past in other countries, but the UK government made it clear that it wanted the outcome in Scotland to be clear and definitive for or against full independence. We can infer from this that London wanted to avoid the issue of a complete renegotiation of the status of Scotland within the UK. London was willing to gamble on the outcome of an independence referendum, but did not want to enter into negotiations over federalism in Scotland, for example. The Edinburgh Agreement also stipulated that there be a lengthy time-frame given for the referendum campaign. This was a concession to the SNP given the fact that support for Scottish independence steadily rose in the two years between the Agreement and the actual referendum.⁴⁴ And finally, the Scottish government was allowed to extend voting participation to 16 and 17 year-olds living in Scotland due to the far-reaching effect such a vote for independence might have for future generations.⁴⁵ Ultimately, the Agreement's three rules revealed the UK government's commitment to holding a fair referendum on Scottish independence and their willingness to respect the final results.

After the rules of the Edinburgh Agreement were implemented, Scotland held its independence referendum two years later in 2014. The Scottish people turned out in large numbers to participate in what was unanimously considered a fair voting process, and they rejected independence by a 10% margin.⁴⁶ The decisive vote against Scottish independence was presumably met with a huge sigh of relief by members of the UK government. Nevertheless, those in favor of a closer union between Scotland and the UK would not be able to celebrate for long. Even those who campaigned for the "No" side in the referendum debate demanded further devolution of powers to Scotland's government. These included changing Scotland's constitutional structure to give the Scottish Parliament more control over its own

⁴³ "Agreement between the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government on a referendum on independence for Scotland" 2012

⁴⁴ Scottish Social Attitudes 2016

⁴⁵ Mullen 2016, 6

⁴⁶ "Scotland Decides" BBC 2014

elections and increasing the Scottish government's powers over public benefits and taxation.⁴⁷ These changes were carried out by 2017.⁴⁸ Despite their loss in the referendum, the nationalists also benefited from a surge in support for the SNP. In the 2015 UK general election, the SNP won 56 out of 59 Scottish seats in the UK parliament. And, as mentioned earlier, with uncertainty about Britain's future in the EU on the horizon, the SNP began pressing London for another Scottish independence referendum in the near future.

London's Decision-Making Process

Out of the four hypotheses examined in this thesis, three help explain the UK central government's decision to permit Scotland to hold an independence referendum. As predicted by the democratic-institutions hypothesis, Britain's political institutions, as well as its norms surrounding democracy and the right of self-determination, played a decisive role in London's decision-making. Consistent with the precedent-setting hypothesis, the UK government also should have had little fear that allowing an independence referendum in Scotland would set a precedent which would lead to similar ones in either of the two other active national-secession campaigns in the UK: Northern Ireland and Wales. And finally, as the value-of-territory hypothesis predicts, the economic value of Scotland as a territory was not high enough to persuade London that it should prohibit an independence referendum to be held. The remaining hypothesis for explaining central government responses to referendum demands does not appear to apply in the Scottish case: there is little evidence that international pressure in favor of Scottish secession played a large role in London's decision to permit the independence referendum to be held.

Direct international pressure did not play a large role in the Scottish referendum case simply because it was nearly nonexistent. It goes without saying there were no international peacekeeping operations in Britain during this time—certainly none in favor of the Scottish nation-state project. The UK is also a permanent member of the UN Security Council, meaning it is relatively immune to

⁴⁷ Mullen 2016, 9-10

⁴⁸ Ibid.

international pressure on its domestic political decisions.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the EU might have been able to exert some pressure on the UK had London attempted to block the referendum. But as we will see more of in the Catalan case, the EU's deference to member states over national-secession projects suggests that the EU was not willing to impose serious penalties on the UK if London had not decided to permit Scotland to hold an independence referendum.

If not international pressure, then what helps explain why London allowed Scotland to hold its referendum? The argument that the UK was willing to risk Scottish secession because the territory of Scotland is not highly valuable (the value-of-territory hypothesis) has some merit. Scotland's economic output has only a marginally positive effect on the UK's economy as a whole. With 8.3% of the UK's total population, Scotland contributes about 9.1% of the UK's total tax revenue.⁵⁰ Yet Scotland also receives slightly more than the UK average in government expenditures per capita. This is probably due to the high costs associated with delivering healthcare services to Scotland's more remote and rural regions.⁵¹ The net effect of Scotland's total fiscal impact on the UK economy is therefore roughly neutral. According to the value-of-territory hypothesis, the UK central government may have been willing to risk Scottish secession because it would not have resulted in major financial losses for the UK. This argument is further supported by the fact that a major source of Scottish tax revenue may be running dry. According to government statistics, Scottish North Sea oil production peaked in 1999 and is expected to be depleted within the next few decades.⁵² North Sea oil typically accounts for between 10 and 20% of Scotland's tax revenue.⁵³ When these revenues are gone, Scotland's economic value will be worth even less for the UK. Anticipation of this fact may have made London slightly more likely to acquiesce to the referendum demands in 2014.

In contrast to this revenue-based logic, however, the value-of-territory hypothesis has some major weaknesses when other costs are included. Scottish independence may not look financially costly for the

⁴⁹ Bell 2016, 198

⁵⁰ "Government Expenditure & Revenue Scotland 2013-2014" 2015

⁵¹ BBC News 2014

⁵² UK Government Department of Energy and Climate Change 2014

⁵³ "Government Expenditure & Revenue Scotland 2013-2014" 2015

UK on paper, but there are several economic downsides to secession which are not as easy to measure as net fiscal impact. An independent Scotland would mean the costs of doing business over the newly created border could go up. The SNP's plan to keep an open border with England and retain the pound as their currency would only mitigate, but not eliminate, these costs. Another financial burden placed on the UK government in the event of Scottish secession would be the relocation of the Trident nuclear missile system. The UK's submarine-based nuclear arsenal is based near Glasgow and so would probably need to be moved elsewhere in the UK if Scotland became independent. Some sort of deal whereby the UK could still maintain its Trident base within an independent Scotland is unlikely to happen due to the SNP's vocal opposition to nuclear weapons.⁵⁴ The cost to the UK for relocating Trident has been estimated at between three and four billion pounds.⁵⁵ Hidden costs of secession, like trade disruption and Trident relocation, weaken the value-of-territory hypothesis as an explanation for why the UK allowed Scotland to hold an independence referendum. Ultimately the UK would probably have suffered economically if Scotland had seceded, yet the central government permitted them to vote on the issue anyways.

A better explanation for the UK's decision to permit a Scottish independence referendum is the precedent-setting hypothesis. The central government had little reason to worry that accommodating the SNP's demands for an independence referendum would increase similar demands for referendums among the UK's two other national-secession campaigns. At the same time Scotland received its first round of devolution in the late 1990's, Wales gained a considerable amount of autonomy as well—including its own local government and National Assembly. But, unlike in Scotland, devolution in Wales did not seem to spark a significant increase in Welsh nationalism. The SNP's equivalent nationalist party in Wales, the Plaid Cymru, has never won a majority of seats in the Welsh Assembly. And the Plaid Cymru also currently only has four members (10% of Wales's total) in the UK Parliament compared to the SNP's 35 (59% of Scotland's total).⁵⁶ Likewise, the Welsh public is less enthusiastic about independence as

⁵⁴ Walker 2015, 12

⁵⁵ Chalmers and Chalmers 2014, 12

⁵⁶ Parliament.uk 2018

compared to Scots. In a recent survey, only 26% of Welsh people supported Welsh independence.⁵⁷

Contrast this to the 44% of Scots who actually voted for independence in 2014. With the lack of Welsh support for independence, it is unlikely that the UK central government would have feared that a Scottish independence referendum would lead to subsequent demands for independence in Wales.

The UK's other major national-secession campaign is in Northern Ireland. Nationalists in Northern Ireland seek to reunite their region with the Republic of Ireland to the south. As with Scotland and Wales, Northern Ireland received a significant amount of increased autonomy via devolution in the late 1990's. However, the Northern Ireland Act of 1998 differed from its Scottish and Welsh counterparts in at least one crucial way. Section 1 of the Act includes this passage on the status of Northern Ireland:

“But if the wish expressed by a majority in such a poll is that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland, the Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament such proposals to give effect to that wish as may be agreed between Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the Government of Ireland.”⁵⁸

This means that there is already an explicit agreement between Northern Ireland and the UK central government granting Northern Ireland the right to hold its own independence referendum. This guaranteed right to hold a future referendum on the status of Northern Ireland was crucial to ensure the passage of the Good Friday Agreement⁵⁹—the peace settlement which largely ended sectarian conflict in the region. So we should not expect Northern Irish nationalists to increase their demands for secession if London set a precedent in permitting Scotland to hold an independence referendum in 2014. They have had the right to hold an independence referendum for over a decade yet, to date, have not decided to pursue one.

The value-of-territory hypothesis and precedent-setting hypothesis both go partway in explaining the UK central government's decision to allow Scotland to hold an independence referendum. The Scottish case is useful in that its outcome is consistent with what these hypotheses would predict. But these explanations are inadequate on their own because they rely heavily on the assumption that all

⁵⁷ YouGov 2017

⁵⁸ Northern Ireland Act 1998

⁵⁹ McEvoy 2015, 61; Mandelson 2007, 120

national-secession campaigns are continuously in a position to demand an independence referendum from their central governments. If this assumption were true, then the explanation is that the SNP was permitted to hold its referendum because Scotland has a fairly neutral territorial value to the UK and because it is unlikely to spark a precedent for others. The problem is that this assumption about national-secession campaigns always desiring their own independence referendum is not quite accurate. As we saw in the Northern Ireland case, that national-secession campaign has had the ability to hold an independence referendum since 1998 yet has not exercised its right to do so. Perhaps this is due to a lack of popular support for Irish reunification in Northern Ireland. To truly explain the UK's decision in permitting Scotland to hold an independence referendum, it is necessary to examine factors other than the *lack* of territorial value or the *low likelihood* of setting a precedent.

The best explanation for the Scottish referendum comes from the UK's democratic institutions and norms. The 1707 Acts of Union, which formally joined Scotland and the UK, have generally been perceived by both sides as a voluntary agreement between sovereign nations which requires the continuous consent of both populations.⁶⁰ This is made possible by the fact that the UK constitution is not a single written document. It is made up of hundreds of years of continuously evolving laws and precedents from the common law tradition.⁶¹ Even Margaret Thatcher, who was notoriously opposed to Scottish nationalism and devolution, agreed that Scotland deserved the right of self-determination.⁶² The practice of continuous consent in the union between Scotland and the UK has been reinforced by the use of referendums. In 1979 Scotland narrowly voted to reject devolution, but then voted overwhelmingly in favor of it in 1997.⁶³ We also saw the UK's principle of continuous consent at work in Northern Ireland with Good Friday Agreement's inclusion of the right to hold a referendum. The historical precedent for deciding self-determination issues via referendum made the UK's decision to permit the 2014 Scottish independence referendum more straightforward.

⁶⁰ Bell 2016, 201

⁶¹ Aroney 2016, 303

⁶² Keating 2013, 129

⁶³ Kidd and Petrie 2016, 38-43

The creation of a Scottish segment state via devolution in 1998 was another factor which made a legal independence referendum more likely. This occurred when the 1998 Scotland Act gave Scotland its own parliament, which dealt with many of the day-to-day activities typical of a central government.⁶⁴ From then on, Scotland has had a degree of political autonomy over its own affairs. This segment state make the hypothetical transition from regional autonomy to full independence smoother. Institutions such as a devolved parliament can quickly expand their role to govern a newly sovereign state.⁶⁵ This likely made the UK government more willing to allow Scotland to hold the independence referendum because they would not have to worry about secession leading to political turmoil from their new neighbor.

⁶⁴ Kidd and Petrie 2016, 44

⁶⁵ Roeder 2007, 351

Chapter 4

Case Study: Catalonia

Catalonia held its second independence referendum in three years on October 1, 2017. Unlike the UK government's acquiescence to Scotland's referendum in 2014, Spain declared Catalonia's to be illegal. Spain's national police and Civil Guard were dispatched to Catalonia and attempted to suppress the vote. Clashes between the central government law enforcement and Catalan nationalist protesters resulted in 844 injuries.⁶⁶ Despite this violence, over two million Catalans still managed to vote in the referendum (42.3% turnout) which resulted in a 90% vote in favor of independence.⁶⁷ This landslide victory for the nationalists was partly due to the fact that pro-unionist Catalans boycotted the illegal referendum.⁶⁸ Carles Puigdemont, then the President of the Catalan parliament, declared independence for Catalonia a few days after the vote, but subsequently fled to Belgium after facing charges of sedition from the Spanish central government.⁶⁹ In response to this declaration of independence, Spain dissolved Catalonia's regional parliament and scheduled a new election on December 21. Although the anti-independence Citizens party won a plurality of seats in this election, pro-independence parties won enough seats to potentially create a majority coalition government.⁷⁰ As of the writing of this thesis in March 2018, Catalonia's parliament still has not formed a government and the region's future is uncertain.

Catalonia deserves its own chapter for a few reasons. First, as mentioned in the chapter on Scotland, these two cases are well-suited for comparison. The similarities between Scotland and Catalonia—central government regime type, level of economic prosperity, population size, geography, lack of substantial political violence, sub-state political institutions, and their referendums' temporal

⁶⁶ BBC 2017

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ The Economist 2017

⁶⁹ Kingsley and Minder 2018

⁷⁰ The Guardian 2017

proximity—should lead one to expect that the central governments in each state would behave similarly when presented with demands for an independence referendum. But this was not what happened. In contrast to the United Kingdom’s full cooperation in the Scottish referendum, Spain chose to ignore the results of Catalonia’s vote in 2014 and then actively tried to suppress the second referendum in 2017. This divergence in outcomes, given the multitude of similarities between the two cases, should offer valuable insights into the specific causal factors which influence how central governments respond to demands for independence referendums.

The second reason to delve deeper into the Catalonia case is the fact that two independence referendums were held in Catalonia within a short period of time. If the value in comparing Scotland to Catalonia lies in their shared characteristics listed above, then comparing Catalonia in 2014 to Catalonia in 2017 provides even greater control of other factors when examining central government behavior. Few variables relevant to the four hypotheses discussed in this thesis varied during this time span. In the three-year period between referendums Spain did not go through any sort of regime change away from democracy (in fact, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy of the conservative People’s Party remained in power throughout), the number of other nation-state projects in Spain remained constant, the 2014 referendum did not spark significant international condemnation of the Spanish government, and the relative economic value of Catalonia to the rest of Spain did not change very much. Yet despite these constants, the Spanish central government made a much larger effort to suppress the 2017 referendum than the 2014 referendum. I discuss some of the reasons for this discrepancy towards the end of this chapter.

Background on Catalan Nationalism

Whereas Scotland and England voluntarily formed a union with one another in 1707, Catalonia was subjugated by Spain after Catalonia’s defeat on September 11, 1714, following the end of the bloody War of Spanish Succession.⁷¹ Catalonia remained under centralized Spanish control until the 1930’s when it briefly gained some autonomy. However, this freedom was short-lived and Catalan separatism was

⁷¹ Vilà Carrera 2014, 79

forcibly stamped out under the reign of Francisco Franco (1936-1975).⁷² After Franco's death in 1975, Catalan nationalism began to rebound. A new Spanish constitution guaranteeing certain rights to Spain's various national groups was written in 1978, and Catalonia received its own regional parliament in 1980.⁷³ The 1978 constitution also created 16 other autonomous communities in Spain.

The dominant party coalition in the new Catalan parliament throughout the 1980's and 1990's was the *Convergencia i Unio* (CiU). The CiU originally only favored increased autonomy for Catalonia, but shifted towards a more pro-secessionist platform after its defeat by the left-wing pro-independence *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC) in Catalonia's 2003 elections.⁷⁴ Rather than a single nationalist umbrella party (like the SNP is in Scotland), Catalans sort themselves into several regional parties depending on the degree to which they favor independence, autonomy, or continuing union for Catalonia—as well as along the left-right political spectrum.⁷⁵ The CiU disbanded in 2015 and Catalan party politics remains highly fragmented today.

The 2014 Referendum and Aftermath

The popularity of the Catalan independence movement grew out of the debate surrounding the region's updated Statute of Autonomy. Passed via legal referendum in 2006, Catalans voted in favor of increased autonomy from Spain, particularly in the areas of Catalan language promotion, cultural and economic protection, and immigration.⁷⁶ In addition, this updated Statute of Autonomy called for a greater recognition of Catalan "nationhood" within Spain. The claim of nationhood was largely symbolic, but it none the less worried some in Madrid. The Prime Minister of Spain at the time, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of the center-left Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE), was initially on board with increased Catalan autonomy, but watered down the final version of the Statute by removing the section recognizing Catalan

⁷² Crameri 2014, 14

⁷³ Minahan 1995, 113

⁷⁴ Crameri 2014, 19-20

⁷⁵ Crameri 2014, 15; Duerr 2015, 101

⁷⁶ Duerr 2015, 133

nationhood.⁷⁷ The Statute was then sent to Spain's Constitutional Court which did not render a decision until 2010. In that year the Constitutional Court declared significant portions of the Statute unconstitutional, including the sections on language and fiscal autonomy.⁷⁸ The frustration this decision caused among many Catalan nationalists was the spark which ignited growing calls for independence.⁷⁹

From 2009 to 2011, a total of 552 independence referendums were held in Catalonia's municipalities. Of those who participated, 91.7% voted in favor of independence. But due to a turnout of only 18%,⁸⁰ these votes should not be taken as a representative sample of the strength of Catalan nationalism. On September 11, 2012 (Catalonia Day), massive independence protests erupted in Barcelona—Catalonia's largest city. These were followed by elections in the Catalan Parliament two months later which resulted in pro-independence parties receiving two-thirds of the seats.⁸¹ During this time of growing nationalist fervor in Catalonia, the central government in Spain stated firmly that Catalan independence was out of the question and any referendum on the subject would be illegal.⁸² Artur Mas, the Catalan Parliament's President at the time, attempted to negotiate an independence referendum with Madrid in 2013, but the central government did not acquiesce.⁸³

Despite Spain's warning that it would be illegal, an independence referendum was held in Catalonia on November 9, 2014. Mas called the vote a "popular consultation" instead of a "referendum" in deference to Spain's warning. But this did little to appease the central government in Madrid.⁸⁴ The vote was 80.8% in favor of independence, but again, a low turnout (41.6%) hurt the validity of the result.⁸⁵ Because it was deemed illegal by Spain, unionists in Catalonia boycotted the vote so as not to legitimize the outcome. The central government did nothing to prevent the voting from taking place, but it later convicted Mas, and other nationalist leaders, of not obeying the Constitutional Court. This resulted

⁷⁷ Vilà Carrera 2014, 80

⁷⁸ Cramer 2014, 44

⁷⁹ Vilà Carrera 2014, 80

⁸⁰ Cramer 2014, 47

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 50

⁸² Duerr 2015, 104

⁸³ Cramer 2014, 51

⁸⁴ Duerr 2015, 110

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 108

in the Catalan independence leaders being fined and barred from holding political office for several years.⁸⁶

In the three years between the 2014 referendum and the 2017 referendum, opinions among Catalans regarding independence stayed relatively constant. The Catalan Parliament's Center for Opinion Studies conducted surveys two or three times a year on what sort of relationship Catalans wanted their nation to have with Spain. Support for independence was about 39% at the beginning of 2015 and 40% at the end of 2017.⁸⁷ Yet pro-independence parties remained strong after the illegal referendum in 2014. Carles Puigdemont, Mas's successor as President of the Catalan Parliament, was determined to hold another independence referendum in 2017, which eventually resulted in the events described in the introduction to this chapter.

Madrid's Decision-Making Process

At first glance, all four hypotheses discussed in this thesis appear to explain, to varying extents, Madrid's refusal to grant Catalonia's demands for an independence referendum. Democratic-institutions hypothesis: while Spain is an exemplary democracy (maintaining a top Polity score of 10 since 1978)⁸⁸ and allows its constituent nations significant autonomy, but its constitution does not compel the central government to grant demands for independence. In fact, its 1978 constitution explicitly forbids secession.⁸⁹ Precedent-setting hypothesis: Spain has two other ongoing national-secession campaigns, one of which (the Basque Country) has engaged in violence in the past in an attempt to achieve independence.⁹⁰ This may have made Madrid wary to grant an initial referendum to Catalonia. International-intervention hypothesis: there was little condemnation of Spain from the international community until after the suppression of the 2017 referendum. Thus, foreign actors did not constrain Madrid's behavior. Value-of-territory hypothesis: Catalonia is the richest region in Spain outside of

⁸⁶ Jones 2017

⁸⁷ Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió 2015, 2017

⁸⁸ Polity IV Country Report 2010: Spain

⁸⁹ Article 2. Spanish Constitution 1978

⁹⁰ Bourne 2008, 29

Madrid and makes an outsized contribution to the Spanish economy.⁹¹ Madrid sees Catalonia as a major contributor to the Spanish economy, and so does not want to risk Catalan independence.

As in the Scottish case, international-intervention had the least to do with Madrid's decision-making. This is because unless national groups in a country are being discriminated against, or denied the same rights as others, there is no international consensus on the right of nations to unilaterally secede from the common-state.⁹² Some fervent Catalan nationalists claim this is taking place, but it is far from evident to the rest of the world. As I have argued before, other states are typically reticent to support the secessionist demands of groups in other countries because doing so only helps legitimize the same demands among that state's own national-secession campaigns. In fact, even foreign national-secessionists are sometimes disincentivized from supporting their compatriots in other countries. Because the Scottish National Party wanted an independent Scotland to join the European Union, for which they would have to gain Spanish approval (all EU member states must unanimously agree to allow new states to join), they were careful to withhold support from Catalonia's illegal 2014 referendum.⁹³ The EU itself also did little to pressure Madrid. Viviane Reding, the European Commission Vice-President, implored Catalonia to drop its demands for secession and warned that an independent Catalonia would be stuck in a long negotiation process to rejoin the EU.⁹⁴

International condemnation of Spain grew following the 2017 referendum. But this was mostly directed at the state's use of police violence towards protesters, rather than at Madrid's decision to declare the referendum illegal. A spokesperson for the EU condemned the violence taking place in Catalonia but also said, "This is an internal matter for Spain that has to be dealt with in line with the constitutional order of Spain."⁹⁵ Many other world leaders echoed the sentiment that the violence was regrettable, but that Spain had the final say on issues of Catalan self-determination. Because Spain faced little more than verbal denunciation of its handling of the 2017 referendum, it is unlikely that the international community

⁹¹ Vilà Carrera 2014, 80-1

⁹² Radan 2014, 10

⁹³ Duerr 2015, 109

⁹⁴ Reding 2014

⁹⁵ "Statement on the events in Catalonia" 2017

plays a large role in Madrid's decision-making. Perhaps the only effect will be that Spain will once again decide to simply ignore, rather than actively suppress via police intervention, future demands from Catalonia for an independence referendum.

So, if Spain's decisions were not constrained by international intervention, what were the factors that made them choose to ignore or suppress the Catalan referendums? After all, the UK and Canada also avoided international pressure, yet these two states permitted national-secessionists to hold independence referendums for Scotland and Quebec. A plausible explanation for Spain's motives comes from the value-of-territory hypothesis. In 2014, Catalonia generated 19% of Spanish GDP and made a net contribution (measured in taxes paid minus benefits received) of \$20 billion to the country's economy.⁹⁶ It also accounts for 23.8% of Spain's tourism, 25.6% of exports, and 29.2% of net inward investment.⁹⁷ These figures are remarkable given the fact that Catalonia only accounts for 16% of Spain's total population. An independent Catalonia, therefore, would pose a significant economic loss for the rest of Spain. This may be why most non-Catalan Spaniards oppose Catalan independence—or even greater economic autonomy for Catalonia.⁹⁸

The value-of-territory hypothesis works in theory for the Catalonia case, but it is impossible to know for certain how much the region's economic value was on the minds of the politicians in Madrid. Because Catalonia's outsized fiscal contributions are understood as a powerful force in animating Catalan nationalism⁹⁹, Madrid was careful not to make this sort of argument lest they appear avaricious. Instead, Prime Minister Rajoy repeatedly appealed to the unconstitutional nature of a Catalan independence referendum in his public remarks on the topic.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, nationalism in Catalonia is probably only fervent enough to the point of demanding an independence referendum because enough of its citizens are upset that their economic output is being used to subsidize Spain's poorer regions. The evidence for this is the fact that support for Catalonia's independence declines significantly in opinion polls when an

⁹⁶ Vilà Carrera 2014, 80

⁹⁷ Henley 2017

⁹⁸ Duerr 2015, 133

⁹⁹ Vilà Carrera 2014, 80-1; Crameri 2014, 42

¹⁰⁰ Kassam 2014

alternative option for increased fiscal autonomy is included.¹⁰¹ So we have no way of knowing if Madrid would try just as hard to prevent secession in its other poorer regions.

While the characteristics of the Catalonia case are consistent with the international-intervention hypothesis and the value-of-territory hypothesis, these arguments do not provide convincing explanations for why Madrid acted the way it did. The remaining two hypotheses, however, do. We will start by looking at Spain's democratic institutions following the 1978 constitution. In that year Spain joined the majority of Western European states as a full democracy.¹⁰² As expected by the democratic-institutions hypothesis, Spain displayed some respect for the values of national self-determination by setting up 17 autonomous communities to represent the various nationalities and regions in the country. All have their own devolved parliaments but vary in the extent to which they have autonomy from central government decisions. For example, the regions of Navarre and the Basque Country are exempt from certain fiscal contributions to the Spanish government because of their strong national distinction.¹⁰³ Catalonia petitioned Madrid for this type of status in their updated 2006 Statute of Autonomy, but it was rejected.

Where the constitutional principle of self-determination ends, however, is in any attempt for a region to gain its independence. Article 2 of the Spanish Constitution says:

“The Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards; it recognizes and guarantees the right to self-government of the nationalities and regions of which it is composed and the solidarity among them all.”¹⁰⁴

This oft-cited passage by Spanish unionists forms the legal basis for Madrid's decision to not allow Catalonia to hold a legal independence referendum. Unlike the UK's unwritten and flexible constitution, which makes it easier to change the relationships between its member nations and the central government, Spain's constitution is much more rigid.¹⁰⁵ Any changes between Catalonia's relationship with the central government in Madrid must first be approved by the Constitutional Court. And this is unlikely given the

¹⁰¹ Vilà Carrera 2014, 81

¹⁰² Polity IV Country Report 2010: Spain

¹⁰³ Carrera 2014, 80

¹⁰⁴ Article 2. Spanish Constitution 1978

¹⁰⁵ Vilà Carrera 2014, 82; Requejo and Sanjuame i Calvet 2013, 113

fact that the Court rejected relatively modest proposals for increased Catalan autonomy in the 2006 Statute of Autonomy. Whether the Spanish constitution reflects the norms and values of Spain or not, it is still a useful tool Madrid used in declaring Catalonia's referendums illegal.

Finally, we arrive at one of the most persuasive reasons for why Spain decided to declare the Catalan referendum illegal. This comes from the precedent-setting hypothesis. There is evidence that Madrid believed that a Catalonia independence referendum would set a precedent for future referendums elsewhere in Spain—particularly in the Basque Country. The signs of this came early. During the debate over Catalonia's expanded Statute of Autonomy in 2006, Prime Minister Zapatero explicitly worried that if Catalonia was able to claim "nationhood", the Basque Country would soon follow.¹⁰⁶ In fact, the referendum in which Catalonia voted for the Statute of Autonomy in 2006 may have itself set a precedent for Catalonia's referendum demands in 2014 and 2017.

The Basque separatist movement has plagued Spanish central governments for decades. Violence from the *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA), a paramilitary terrorist group which sought Basque independence, was especially active during the 1980's and 1990's.¹⁰⁷ Although the ETA signed a ceasefire in 2010, and are in the process of disarming themselves, there has not been a peace agreement between Basque nationalists and Spain like there has been between Northern Irish nationalists and the UK. In response to the 2017 Catalan referendum, the President of the Basque government Iñigo Urkullu spoke out in support of the Catalan nationalists. Without explicitly demanding a referendum for the Basque Country, Urkullu none the less argued for "consultations [that] enable citizens to express their wishes and to see that their opinion had been considered."¹⁰⁸ Madrid certainly got the message. A backslide into violence in the Basque Country may currently be unlikely, but the lack of a definitive settlement means a momentous event—such as Catalan independence—could spark a resurgence of Basque nationalism.

¹⁰⁶ Vilà Carrera 2014, 80

¹⁰⁷ Raquejo and Calvet 2013, 114

¹⁰⁸ Urkullu 2017

If the factors relating to the four hypotheses in this thesis did not substantively differ in Spain from 2014 to 2017, then why did Madrid choose to ignore the 2014 referendum, yet attempt to suppress the 2017 referendum? There were no noticeable changes to its commitment to democratic institutions in this time period, the international community responded to Catalonia's demands for a referendum in a similarly muted way (at least before the police violence took place), the precedent-setting problem appeared unchanged, and there was no major difference in Catalonia's relative economic output. Historical analyses of similar cases are also unhelpful for explaining why Madrid changed its response to the two referendums. There are very few instances of national-secession campaigns holding multiple independence referendums in different years. Besides Catalonia, this only took place in Quebec (1980 and 1995), in South Ossetia (1992 and 2006), and in Iraqi Kurdistan (2005 and 2017). In these other three cases their central government's response was the same to the first and second referendum (acquiesce Quebec, and ignore South Ossetia and Iraqi Kurdistan).

According to Madrid, the national police were sent to Catalonia in 2017 to "keep order and act in case the illegal referendum is maintained."¹⁰⁹ But because police were not ordered to intervene in the 2014 illegal referendum; this explanation is inadequate. Perhaps Madrid thought their warnings to the leaders of the Catalan independence campaign in 2014 had been too light, and so a more serious show of force was needed in 2017. But the violence and police brutality that followed the 2017 referendum only emboldened the secessionists and made them appear more sympathetic.¹¹⁰ So if this was an attempt by Madrid to intimidate the Catalan national-secession campaign, it backfired.

While it may have been a simple miscalculation on the part of Madrid, there is still a plausible explanation remaining to explain why the change in central government behavior may have been rational. According to the precedent-setting hypothesis, central governments can often feel the need to build up a tough reputation to deter future separatist challengers. By escalating its response to repeated illegal

¹⁰⁹ Reuters 2017

¹¹⁰ Dearden 2017

referendums in Catalonia, Madrid may have been communicating to would-be secessionists across Spain that it is serious about maintaining Spanish unity.

Discussion of Scotland and Catalonia

As we have seen, the Scottish and Catalan referendum cases share many similarities, yet their central governments responded to the proposed referendums in very different ways: London acquiesced to Scottish demands, whereas Madrid ignored or tried to suppress Catalan demands. How well do the four hypotheses in this thesis explain this difference? Despite the fact that each central government's response is consistent with the value-of-territory hypothesis, it is the weakest of the four explanations. It is true that Scotland is less economically valuable to the UK than Catalonia is to Spain, thus increasing Scotland's chances of holding a legal referendum relative to Catalonia's chances, but we have seen how central governments are unlikely to make such important decisions based on simple economic calculations. Likewise, the international-intervention hypothesis is inadequate for explaining London and Madrid's differing responses. Both central governments were largely free to handle their domestic affairs without international pressure—at least not the type of pressure necessary to induce acquiescence to demands for an independence referendum. Studying only two cases cannot rule out the possibility that the value-of-territory and international-intervention hypotheses predict central government behavior in this domain, but the evidence provided from the Scotland and Catalonia cases is not enough to confidently confirm either of these two hypotheses.

Instead, part of the precedent-setting hypothesis gives us a much clearer picture for understanding the differences between the Scottish and Catalan cases. While both the UK and Spain have a national-secession campaign which previously engaged in separatist violence (Northern Ireland and the Basque Country), the UK was able to arrive at a definitive settlement with the Northern Irish nationalists, whereas Spain lacks such an arrangement with Basque nationalists. The guarantee of the right to hold a referendum in the Good Friday Agreement shows that London has already relinquished control over this issue to the Northern Irish people. In contrast, we have seen that Basque nationalists are viewing the

events in Catalonia with interest and may decide to demand their own independence referendum in the future.¹¹¹ Madrid undoubtedly knows this, and presumably feels that it should take steps to demonstrate its commitment to Spain's unity in its dealings with Catalonia. This finding from our two case studies reveals a more precise explanation for central government behavior than did the original precedent-setting hypothesis. Rather than being constrained by the total number of other national-secession campaigns within their common-state, central governments will consider the referendum-demanding potential of each of them before deciding to grant a first demand.

The final piece to the puzzle for why the Scottish and Catalan referendum demands elicited different responses from their central governments comes from the democratic-institutions hypothesis. The most salient factor affecting London and Madrid's decision-making was their state's constitutions. As we saw in the Scottish case, the United Kingdom and Scotland joined together in 1707 as a partnership of two previously sovereign states. Therefore, Scotland's relationship with the rest of the UK is understood by London to require the continuous consent of the population in Scotland. This dynamic is completely different in Spain. The central government in Madrid had no interest in any Catalan autonomy until the new constitution in 1978. Even after receiving its status as an autonomous community, however, Catalonia was still bound to the Spanish common-state due to the constitutional law of the "indissoluble unity".¹¹² Comparing Scotland to Catalonia shows us how much the political norms and values regarding self-determination, embodied in each common-state's constitution, matters in determining how central governments respond to demands for an independence referendum.

¹¹¹ Urkullu 2017

¹¹² Article 2. Spanish Constitution 1978

Chapter 5

Statistical Analysis

While the preceding case studies show how the hypotheses in this thesis help explain some real-world phenomena, the addition of large-N data analysis is required to test whether these arguments are generalizable. The characteristics that Scotland and Catalonia share, which create an excellent opportunity for qualitative comparison, vary wildly across all other national-secession campaign cases. Independence referendums are held all over the world in places as diverse from one another as South Sudan, Uzbekistan, East Timor, and Quebec. We have already seen how some of the arguments in this thesis explain central government behavior in the Scotland and Catalonia case. But the goal of this section is to subject these hypotheses to statistical analysis to see how well they predict central government behavior across all cases.

Case Selection

My quantitative analysis draws from a list of the 171 significant national-secession campaigns which were ongoing sometime between 1945 and 2010.¹¹³ A national-secession campaign is defined as a political movement which claims to represent a nation of people and whose goal is to form a new sovereign state within territory that is currently within the metropole of another sovereign state.¹¹⁴ Remember that a *nation* in this context refers to a large group of people, bound together by a common characteristic such as ethnicity, and who reside in a territory which can plausibly be viewed as their homeland. And the *metropole* is the central territory of a common-state, as opposed to its overseas colonial holdings.

¹¹³ Roeder 2018

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 30

National-secession campaigns differ from regional-secession campaigns, which want independence for their region, but do not claim to represent a nation of people.¹¹⁵ For example, the Calexit movement's goal is to make California independent from the United States. But because Californians do not generally see themselves as a distinct nation of people (unlike, for example some native Hawaiians¹¹⁶), Calexit does not qualify as a national-secession campaign. I have excluded regional-secession campaigns from this analysis. Rarely, if ever, do they result in the creation of an independent sovereign state because a strong national identity is such an important condition for successful secessions.¹¹⁷

National-secession campaigns also differ from decolonization campaigns, because the latter seek independence for a territory outside of the common-state's metropole. While they may contain the same element of strong national identity, they are excluded from my analysis on independence referendums because the norms surrounding decolonization differ from the norms surrounding secession. The United Nations formulated explicit rules on the right of nations of peoples to self-determination, which helped lead to a wave of global decolonization after 1945.¹¹⁸ However, the UN was more circumspect in granting self-determination rights to nations residing within a state's metropole. After enumerating the rights of colonies seeking independence, the 1970 UN General Assembly Declaration on Friendly Relations stated:

“Nothing in the foregoing paragraphs shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples as described above and thus possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction as to race, creed or colour.”¹¹⁹

The level of international consensus on the rights of self-determination for colonies does not exist for national-secession campaigns, which is why decolonization movements are excluded from my analysis.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 31

¹¹⁶ Lyte 2017

¹¹⁷ Sorens 2012, 20; Cox 2008, 42; Wellman 2005, 113; Roepstorff 2013, 95

¹¹⁸ Radan 2014, 9

¹¹⁹ “Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations” 1970

My analysis is limited to national-secession campaigns that drew significant attention to themselves on the world stage. This is operationalized by whether a campaign's demands for independence received international attention in the pages of the *Times* of London, the *New York Times*, or *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*.¹²⁰ This baseline for inclusion omits frivolous demands for independence from small groups or individuals that did not concern the international community. It can be safely assumed that central governments do not spend much time deliberating on how to respond to independence referendum demands of this type.

Measuring the Dependent Variables

The goal of this thesis is to attempt to identify the conditions under which an independence referendum is permitted or resisted by the central government. To accomplish this using regression analysis, I employ three dichotomous dependent variables in separate equations: 1) whether or not a national-secession campaign held an independence referendum that was permitted by its central government (a *legal* independence referendum), 2) whether or not a national-secession campaign held an independence referendum that was *not* permitted by its central government (an *illegal* independence referendum), and 3) whether or not a national secession campaign held an independence referendum at all. By analyzing legal and illegal referendums separately, we should arrive at a better understanding of the reasons why some central governments acquiesce to independence referendum demands (resulting in legal referendums) and why other central governments ignore these demands (resulting in illegal referendums). Variable 3 encompasses all the positive cases in variables 1 and 2, and is used to examine factors that may affect both legal and illegal referendums.

I define an independence referendum as a ballot measure, voted on by the citizens of a particular territory, on the question of whether that territory should secede from its common-state and form a new sovereign state. In order to construct my dependent variables for when these referendums occurred, I started with Wikipedia's independence referendum page which contains an extensive list of cases. After

¹²⁰ Roeder 2017, 274

checking the reliability of this list by checking cases in James Minahan’s encyclopedic *Nations Without States* and reputable news reports, such as those from the BBC, I arrived at a comprehensive list of independence referendums held by national-secession campaigns from 1945 to 2017. This list was then sub-divided into legal and illegal referendums based on the assessment of relevant news reports regarding the central government’s decision in each case. In Table 1, referendum is coded as *legal* if the central government indicated it would respect the validity of the outcome—or if it did so *ex post facto*.¹²¹ A referendum is coded as *illegal* if the central government condemned the vote or tried to punish the secessionist organizers. These are displayed in Table 2.

Table 1: Legal Independence Referendums Since 1945

Common-State	National-Secession Campaign	Year
Indonesia	West Papua	1969
Canada	Quebec	1980
Yugoslavia	Slovenia	1990
USSR	Armenia	1991
USSR	Azerbaijan	1991
Yugoslavia	Croatia	1991
USSR	Estonia	1991
USSR	Georgia	1991
USSR	Latvia	1991
USSR	Lithuania	1991
Yugoslavia	Macedonia	1991
USSR	Ukraine	1991
USSR	Turkmenistan	1991
USSR	Uzbekistan	1991
Yugoslavia	Bosnia	1992
Ethiopia	Eritrea	1993
Canada	Quebec	1995
Indonesia	Timor Leste	1999
Serbia & Montenegro	Montenegro	2006
Sudan	South Sudan	2011
United Kingdom	Scotland	2014

¹²¹ In many of the Soviet-successor cases, Moscow did not give explicit permission to hold an independence referendum. But the Soviet Union’s chaos and disintegration during 1991 meant it would not challenge the validity of these referendums.

Table 2: Illegal Independence Referendums Since 1945

Common-State	National-Secession Campaign	Year
Denmark	Faroe Island	1946
Yugoslavia	Kosovo	1991
Georgia	South Ossetia	1992
Iraq	Iraqi Kurdistan	2005
Georgia	South Ossetia	2006
Moldova	Transnistria	2006
Spain	Catalonia	2014
Iraq	Iraqi Kurdistan	2017
Spain	Catalonia	2017

Measuring the Independent Variables

The explanatory variables include:

1. *Democracy*. This is a dichotomous variable which indicates whether a national-secession campaign's common-state was considered democratic in a given year. This measure of democracy is determined if the state had a Polity score of 6 through 10.¹²² This variable allows us to test the democratic-institutions hypothesis: whether democratic central governments central governments are more likely to permit independence referendums.
2. *Anocracy*. This is another dichotomous variable which measures a common-state's regime type. An anocracy is a state which receives a Polity score of between 5 and -5. The democratic-institutions hypothesis predicts that democracies will be most likely to permit independence referendums, followed by anocracies, and then followed by autocracies (states with Polity scores between -6 and -10).
3. *Other Nation-State Projects*. This is a discrete variable which counts the number of other national-secession campaigns that share a common-state with the observation campaign in a given year. This variable is used for the precedent-setting hypothesis, which expects that as the

¹²² Polity IV Project, 2014

number of other nation-state projects grows, we should see a decrease in the likelihood that a central government will permit an independence referendum to be held.

4. *Peacekeeping*. A dichotomous variable, this indicates whether there were international peacekeeping forces in a national-secession campaign's common-state in a given year. This variable does not distinguish the types of peacekeeping involved, but can still be used as a rough indicator of whether a central government was facing extreme international pressure to permit the holding of an independence referendum.
5. *Regional Inequality* is a continuous variable measuring the ratio of light intensity per capita in the territory of the national-secessionists compared to the common-state's light intensity per capita. This variable uses light intensity as a proxy for relative prosperity, and is helpful to determine the economic value of a given territory. Because this data is based on satellite imagery, there are no values for this form of regional inequality in my analysis before 1985.
6. *Petroleum* is a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not there are significant amounts of oil or gas deposits in the territory of the national-secessionists in a given year. Along with *Regional Inequality*, this should be an important variable for determining how much economic value a central government places on a particular region.

Table 3: Summary of Independent Variables

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Democratic-Institutions	Democracy	1. Polity scores 6 to 10
	Anocracy	2. Polity scores -5 to 5
Precedent-setting	Other Projects	3. Other nation-state project in common-state
	Peacekeeping	4. Presence of international peacekeeping forces
Value-of-territory	Regional Inequality	5. Ratio of light output of region to common-state
	Petroleum	6. Presence of significant oil or gas reserves

Here is a quick recap of how these independent variables are expected to fit in with the hypotheses listed in Chapter 2. The democratic-institutions hypothesis predicts that common-states which are more democratic will be more likely to acquiesce to demands to hold an independence referendum. Therefore, the *Democracy* variable should have a positive association with the chance of holding an independence referendum—especially legal ones. The *Anocracy* variable should have a weaker positive association, or even a negative association according to the democratic-institutions hypothesis.

According to the precedent-setting hypothesis, common-states which have higher numbers of potential secessionist groups should be more likely to suppress or ignore demands for independence referendums to be held. Therefore, we should expect to see a negative association between the *Other Projects* variable and the likelihood of a legal independence referendum being held.

The international-intervention hypothesis predicts that central governments which experience pressure from the international community are more likely to acquiesce to independence referendum demands. So, we would expect to see a positive association between the *Peacekeeping* variable and the likelihood of an independence referendum being held.

Finally, according to the value-of-territory hypothesis, central governments are more likely to suppress or ignore demands for independence referendums which come from regions that are economically valuable. Therefore, higher values of the *Regional Inequality* variable (corresponding to more prosperous territories) should have a negative association with the likelihood of a legal independence referendum being held. Territories with significant oil and gas reserves (indicated by the *Petroleum* variable) should see a similar negative association.

There is good reason to believe that the explanatory variables chosen above are not the only factors which influence the likelihood of an independence referendum taking place. The level of secessionist demand for a referendum is another obvious factor which should affect when one is held. I introduce a few other variables, which plausibly have an effect on secessionist demand, in an attempt to control for these effects. Unfortunately, measuring the *motivational* demand for an independence

referendum requires more data collection than is possible within the scope of this thesis. One ideal example would be public opinion data on the views of citizens towards independence within a particular territory for a given year. This could give us a good estimate of how strongly a national-secession campaign is demanding an independence referendum, but unfortunately this information is not available. So instead I use several variables measuring the *feasibility* of demands for an independence referendum. These are structural factors which address the likelihood of an independence referendum getting carried out assuming similar levels of motivation among national-secession campaigns.

Control variables:

1. *Segment State* is a dichotomous variable indicating whether a national-secession campaign is associated with a segment state in a given year. A segment state is a sub-state regional jurisdiction which is meant to represent a nation of people inside another sovereign state.¹²³ They often contain their own political institutions, such as regional legislatures. Due to these institutions, segment states often possess the logistical capability to actually hold an independence referendum. Printing ballots, running polling stations, and counting votes may not be feasible for secessionists who lack the resources of a segment state. Segment states are also one of the most important factors in coordinating a nation's secessionist aspirations, so we can assume that central governments take independence referendum demands from segment states more seriously. Central governments may also be less able to prevent segment states from holding a referendum, thus increasing the likelihood of illegal independence referendums in these cases.
2. *De Facto Statehood* is another dichotomous variable indicating whether a national-secession campaign controls its own de facto state in a given year. De facto states function almost as independent sovereign states, though they lack widespread recognition from the international community. Presumably their *de jure* central governments want to re-establish control over these

¹²³ Roeder 2007, 12

territories, but lack the capabilities to do so. This lack of control should increase the prevalence of illegal independence referendums in these cases. The only option available to the central government is to condemn the vote and ignore the results. De facto states, like segment states, also have the institutions and resources necessary to hold an independence referendum. Despite purporting to display the will of a nation for full self-determination, these referendums are not viewed as legitimate by either their *de jure* central government or the international community. Therefore, de facto statehood should be a major factor in a central government's decision to ignore the results of an independence referendum.

3. *The End of the Cold War* is a dichotomous variable which codes the year 1991 as 1 for all observations, and all other years as 0. This variable represents a period of extreme geopolitical upheaval caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Out of the 25 total independence referendums between 1945 and 2010, 12 were held in nations which were formerly part of either the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia. It would be wrong, therefore, to draw general conclusions about the nature of independence referendums without accounting for these 12 cases which may have simply experienced an extremely rare event.

Quantitative Tests and Analyses

I use a time-series cross-section analysis of 3593 national-secession campaign-year observations to test the statistical relationship between my independent and dependent variables. Unfortunately, several independence referendum cases were dropped due to data limitations. Because values for the *Regional Inequality* variable only began in 1985, referendums in Faroe Islands (1946), West Papua (1969), and Quebec (1980) were dropped from the final analysis. I feel inclusion of the *Regional Inequality* variable is still warranted, however, given how well it captures a region's economic value—a key component of the value-of-territory hypothesis. The dataset for my independent variables also only contained data up until

2010, which resulted in the exclusion of South Sudan (2011), Scotland (2014), Catalonia (2014, 2017) and Iraqi Kurdistan (2017).

My method of statistical analysis is a rare-events logistic regression. There are only 22 observations out of 3593 in which an independence referendum occurred, so using the “rare-events” modification helps mitigate the risk of bias.¹²⁴ And once we subdivide the dependent variable into legal and illegal referendums, the sample becomes even smaller. Logit regression is used because all the dependent variables (whether legal, illegal, or any independence referendum was held) are dichotomous. This type of variable can only take the values of 1 and 0, so some precision would be lost if a linear regression model was used instead.

Table 4 displays the results of the logit analysis on all independence referendums (legal and illegal together) held between 1945 and 2010. According to Model 1, only *Anocracy* and *Other Projects* have a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of an independence referendum being permitted. But the coefficients for these variables contradict the predictions made by their respective hypotheses. For example, higher, rather than lower, values of *Other Projects* help predict when an independence referendum will be permitted. This result belies the expectations made by the precedent-setting hypothesis, which says the opposite should occur. Similarly, the finding that *Anocracy* increases the chance of holding an independence referendum runs counter to the democratic-institutions hypothesis, which expects *Democracy* to be more of a significant factor.

¹²⁴ Williams 2017

Table 4: Logit Analysis of Independence Referendums (Legal and Illegal)

	Model 1	Model 2
Independence Referendum		
Democracy	1.127 (1.21)	1.032 (1.11)
Anocracy	2.918*** (3.34)	2.378** (2.67)
Other Projects	0.205*** (3.62)	0.116 (1.85)
Peacekeeping	1.539 (1.15)	2.110 (1.69)
Regional Inequality	0.0011 (0.08)	0.0007 (0.03)
Petroleum	0.515 (1.00)	0.442 (0.80)
Segment State	1.046 (1.84)	1.019 (1.74)
De Facto Statehood	0.988 (0.74)	0.770 (0.62)
End of the Cold War		3.206*** (6.14)
Constant	-8.719*** (-9.26)	-8.558*** (-9.50)
<i>N</i>	3593	3593

t statistics in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Model 2 runs the same regression again, but this time adds the *End of the Cold War* variable. This is done in an effort to control for the effect the collapse of the Soviet Union had on the national-secession campaigns in that country and in Yugoslavia. As their central governments experienced extreme political turmoil in 1991, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Ukraine, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan all took advantage of the situation and declared themselves independent

after holding legal referendums on the subject. Kosovo also held an independence referendum in 1991, but the results were not recognized by the central government in Belgrade.¹²⁵ Taken together, these Eastern European independence referendums account for about half of the total number of cases in the dataset. The weakness of Model 1 is that it allows these cases, all of which probably had a singular cause, to distort the perceived relationships between variables as we try to generalize the results to other independence referendum cases.

Once we control for the collapse of the Soviet Union, the two statistically significant variables in Model 1 the variable for *Other Projects* fades from the picture. As expected, the *End of the Cold War* is highly significant and, as expected, the relationship between it and the incidence of independence referendums is positive. This transformation between the two models helps explain why the effects of *Other Projects* looked important the first time. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia each had relatively more other nation-state projects in that year than other states: 13 for the Soviet Union and 5 for Yugoslavia (the average for the dataset is 4.17).¹²⁶ It appears that the results in Model 1 were, in fact, being distorted by a confounding variable: the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The continued significance of *Anocracy* in Model 2 casts doubts on the relationship between democratic institutions and independence referendums.

With the exception of *Anocracy*, Table 4 left us with no useful variables to help explain what causes independence referendums in general. So more precise dependent variables must be employed in order to understand the options and constraints central governments have in these situations. The first model for doing this, shown in Table 5, displays the results of another rare-events logit regression, but this time only of legal referendums. The variable for *De Facto Statehood* is excluded because there is never going to be a circumstance where a central government allows an independence referendum to take place in a region it does not control. As expected, given the fact that almost all

¹²⁵ Skendaj 2014, 153

¹²⁶ Roeder 2018

Table 5: Logit Analysis of Independence Referendums (Legal)

	Model 1
Legal Independence Referendum	
Democracy	1.698 (1.12)
Anocracy	3.239* (2.19)
Other Projects	0.147 (1.94)
Peacekeeping	3.072** (3.20)
Regional Inequality	-0.00906 (-0.36)
Petroleum	0.480 (0.70)
Segment State	2.023* (2.14)
End of the Cold War	3.494*** (5.14)
Constant	-10.79*** (-6.62)
<i>N</i>	3593

t statistics in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

of the 1991 independence referendums in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were legal, the *End of the Cold War* variable seems to play a large role. Again, *Anocracy* appears to be a significant factor in predicting the dependent variable (albeit only at the 0.05 level). *Democracy* seems to play no role, which is a large blow to the democratic-institutions hypothesis. According to my hypothesis, democratic central governments should be the most willing to allow specifically legal independence referendums to be held. *Segment State* significance is expected given the large amount of resources and coordination necessary to carry out an independence referendum. This is especially true in cases of legal referendums where strict voting procedures are necessary to ensure the validity of the outcome. Lastly, *Peacekeeping* appears to

have a very significant positive relationship on the likelihood of an independence referendum being held. This is perfectly consistent with the international-intervention hypothesis.

Table 6: Logit Analysis of Independence Referendums (Illegal)

	Model 1
Illegal Independence Referendum	
Democracy	0.290 (0.26)
Anocracy	0.452 (0.42)
Other Projects	0.0339 (0.21)
Peacekeeping	-0.370 (-0.33)
Regional Inequality	0.0046 (0.39)
Petroleum	0.118 (0.12)
Segment State	-0.030 (-0.03)
De Facto Statehood	3.296** (3.22)
Constant	-7.119*** (-5.99)
<i>N</i>	3593

t statistics in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The final statistical test for investigating the decisions of central governments is done by using only illegal independence referendums as the dependent variable. Table 6 displays these results. This time the *End of the Cold War* variable is excluded because, as mentioned earlier, all but one of the 12 independence referendums held in 1991 were legal. The results from Table 6 show that none of the explanatory variables used for our hypotheses play a role in the likelihood of an illegal referendum being

held. What does seem to matter, however, is whether or not the national-secession campaign demanding an independence referendum is in control of its own de facto state. Three out of the six illegal referendum cases occurred in de facto states (South Ossetia 1992 and 2006, and Transnistria 2006), and two others (Kosovo 1991, Iraqi Kurdistan 2005) were in the process of transitioning to de facto statehood. In 1991 secessionists in Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh also held illegal independence referendums in regions that quickly became de facto states.¹²⁷ These two cases were excluded from the statistical analysis because they did not technically qualify as nation-secession campaigns by 1991, but their hypothetical inclusion would have probably meant an even stronger relationship between *De Facto Statehood* and the positive likelihood of illegal independence referendums. Given the fact that there were only 5 illegal referendum cases in this analysis, however, any broad conclusions drawn from these results should be viewed with caution.

Discussion

Overall, the results of the statistical analyses above provide mixed support for the predictions made by each of the four hypotheses in this thesis. Starting with the democratic-institutions hypothesis, we see evidence that contradicts the original argument. The hypothesis predicts that democratic central governments should be the most willing to permit independence referendums, followed by anocratic ones, and then followed by autocratic ones. But according to the results of the legal referendum analysis (Table 5), only anocracy has a statistically significant relationship. Democracy does not seem to play a role in illegal referendums (Table 6). The positive, significant, relationship between anocracy and legal/all independence referendums, as well as the significance of de facto statehood for illegal referendums, suggests a different institutional interpretation. Rather than democratic central governments magnanimously granting groups the right to hold independence referendums, weak central governments with low institutional efficacy appear to be unable to suppress or ignore secessionist demands. These sorts of central governments are more likely to be found in states which are anocracies or unable to control

¹²⁷ Borsi 2007, 45; Bruder and Bruder 2017; 89

their entire territory (thus resulting in secessionist de facto states within its borders). While the results of the statistical analysis suggest this alternative “weak-intuitions” hypothesis, the variables used in the models only capture a small part of the overall democratic-institutions hypothesis. Other variables, such as a central government’s commitment to the norms of liberty and self-determination, or the extent to which a state’s constitution can be interpreted as accepting secessionist demands, may also be important. These variables are much harder to measure than regime type or de facto statehood though. Further investigation into these harder-to-measure effects could yield a clearer understanding of the roles democratic institutions and constitutional norms play in determining when independence referendums are held.

The precedent-setting hypothesis gained little-to-no support from the statistical analysis. The number of other nation-state projects seems to have no effect on whether a central government will permit an independence referendum, legal or illegal, to be held. Again, the problem may be that we are using crude measures in an attempt to capture complex phenomena. The number of other projects could be an inadequate measure for determining a central government’s fear that a precedent will be set if it permits one independence referendum to be held. Perhaps it is not the number of other projects, but the number of all other ethnic groups in a common-state which creates this fear for the central government. Although these groups do not qualify as “secessionist”, a pro-independence referendum outcome could rile up extremist support, which then imposes costs on the central government.

The international-intervention hypothesis experienced the same operationalization problem as the precedent-setting hypothesis. The presence of international peacekeeping is only one way, among so many, that the international community can pressure a central government to permit an independence referendum to be held. Unfortunately, these other methods are much harder to measure because they have to do with implicit threats, global public opinion, or secret negotiations. That said, peacekeeping does appear to have a positive and significant effect on the likelihood of a legal independence referendum taking place. This, then, is one piece of valuable evidence in support of the international-intervention hypothesis.

The value-of-territory hypothesis, unlike the previous three, was able to be tested using highly relevant variables in all the statistical models. The economic value of a particular region should mostly be captured by the *Regional Inequality* variable. And it also stands to reason that central governments should be more likely to hold onto regions with valuable reserves of oil and gas. It appears, however, that the value-of-territory hypothesis simply does not do a good job at explaining the variation in whether independence referendums are permitted or not. The results here do not support the theory that central governments consider the economic value of a territory when deciding how to respond to secessionist demands.

Overall, the results of these statistical analyses point to an explanation for central government behavior that was not anticipated by the original arguments in this thesis. Independence referendums appear to be more likely in states which lack effective institutional authority. Variables, such as anocracy, the possession of de facto statehood, or the political turmoil during the end of the Cold War have the greatest impact on whether or not an independence referendum is held. This would suggest that the extent to which holding a referendum is feasible for the national-secession campaign is a more important factor than the behavior of their central governments. When a central government lacks institutional authority, it will be unable to suppress an independence referendum, and instead must either acquiesce to the demands or ignore them.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to identify the factors which influenced central government behavior when presented with a demand for an independence referendum. To accomplish this, I tested four hypotheses both qualitatively using case study comparison, and quantitatively using statistical analysis. We saw how, in the Scottish and Catalan referendum cases, central governments were primarily influenced by the logic of the precedent-setting and democratic-institutions hypotheses, as opposed to the value-of-territory and international-intervention hypotheses. Starting with the precedent-setting hypothesis: there are strong reasons to believe Madrid feared a legal Catalan independence referendum would initiate demands for one in the Basque Country as well, thus encouraging Madrid to declare the Catalan referendum illegal. London, by contrast, had no reason to fear an increase in either Welsh or Northern Irish referendum demands as a result of permitting Scotland to hold one. Elements of the democratic-intuitions hypothesis, as well, probably played a role. The United Kingdom's evolving, unwritten, and flexible constitution allows for the nations within the common-state to leave the UK if the citizens of that nation desire this. Spain's constitution, on the other hand, is rigid in its proclamation that the unity of the Spanish state is non-negotiable. This leaves us with two major findings from the qualitative analysis: 1) central governments of common-states with more than one motivated and active national-secession campaigns will be less likely to permit an independence referendum, and 2) central governments whose constitutions are more flexible on questions of secession will be more likely to permit an independence referendum.

Unfortunately I was not able to gather quantitative data on either of the two salient independent variables from the case study analysis: motivation and activity of national-secession campaigns, and flexibility of a state's constitution regarding secession. Instead, the results from the statistical analysis in Chapter 5 reveal a new set of circumstances under which central governments are more likely to permit

independence referendums to take place. Government turmoil and collapse in multi-national states, such as what we saw in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in 1991, give national-secessionists the opportunity to successfully demand an independence referendum. As they collapse, central governments in these situations may be too weak to suppress referendums from occurring, and therefore give *de facto* acquiescence. States that are not collapsing, but which are none the less weakly institutionalized (usually anocracies), may have to contend with national-secession campaigns which control *de facto* states within their internationally-recognized borders. Demands for independence referendums in these situations leave central governments with no other option but to ignore them.

Opportunities for Further Research

Both the qualitative and quantitative analyses in this thesis offer many opportunities for further research into the decision-making of central governments regarding demands for independence referendums. The overarching challenge for explaining this process lies in the fact that these demands are not wholly exogenous. National-secession campaigns pick and choose when to demand a referendum in the first place. For example, if the leaders of the campaigns anticipate that the central government will punish them severely for calling a referendum and prevent the holding of the referendum, the secessionists may not call for a referendum in the first place. If the leaders of the campaigns believe they have no chance to win a referendum, why demand one?

This raises the problem of identifying cases of active central government suppression of referendum demands. It is difficult to distinguish whether national-secessionists are being intimidated from demanding a referendum versus when they just lack the interest to hold one. Many of the arguments in this thesis rely on the assumption that most national-secession campaigns want to hold an independence referendum most of the time. Despite the reservations about this assumption listed above, I still believe it is a defensible starting point to study the occurrence of independence referendums. A central government-approved independence referendum is a major event, not only in its own common-state, but around the world. Even if a national-secession campaign is sure it will lose the vote, the fact that

it was able to hold a legal referendum will bring it attention and legitimacy on the world stage—two things its leaders undoubtedly crave. Yet I concede this argument may be too broad and simplistic to apply in every case, which is why further research on the demand-side of independence referendums is required.

Another avenue for further research is in developing more finely tuned measures of my independent variables. As I mentioned earlier, I lacked data on the motivations and activity of national-secession campaigns, and on the flexibility of a state's constitution regarding secession. Without these measures for all national-secession campaign cases, we cannot confidently conclude that the results from the case studies chapters are generalizable outside of Scotland and Catalonia. And while I had good data for measuring certain variables in my statistical analysis, the independent variables selected may not have been enough to capture the nuances and complexity of each of the four hypotheses tested.

The Future for Independence Referendums

Sovereign independent statehood is the only outcome which definitively puts an end to a national-secession campaign's demands for an independence referendum. As we saw in Scotland and Catalonia, neither achieved independence with its referendum. There remain sizable populations in each nation which yearn for independent statehood and will continue striving to achieve it for the foreseeable future. Yet these demands for a referendum will not necessarily continue indefinitely. Quebec held legal independence referendums in 1980 and 1995, each time voting to remain within Canada. Although the national-secessionists only lost the 1995 referendum by 0.59 percentage points (fewer than 55,000 votes!),¹²⁸ today most Quebecers believe the issue of independence has been settled. In a 2016 survey, 82% of Quebec citizens agreed that "Ultimately, Quebec should stay in Canada."¹²⁹

When demands for independence referendums do not recede, however, we should expect central governments to respond in ways similar to the previous referendum demands. Although the current Prime

¹²⁸ Gall, Millette, and Lambert. 2016

¹²⁹ CBC News 2016

Minister of the UK, Theresa May, has said that London will not permit another Scottish referendum until after the Brexit negotiations have completed,¹³⁰ it is likely that Scotland could receive another chance to vote in a legal independence referendum if demand for one remains high. This is because the factors which constrained the UK central government in 2014, chiefly its constitutional relationship with Scotland, will exist for the foreseeable future.

Likewise, it is unlikely that Madrid will suddenly reverse course and acquiesce to Catalonia's referendum demands. The Spanish constitution is still a powerful tool the central government can use to withhold an independence referendum, and Basque nationalism is still a potent force. There are, however, a couple minor changes that could take place in Spain. First, the near-unified international condemnation of Madrid's decision to brutalize Catalan voters during the 2017 referendum, as well as the public relations-boosting martyrdom Catalan nationalist leaders can now claim for themselves, should make the central government less likely to try to actively suppress a future referendum. Instead, we should expect to see Madrid ignore subsequent referendum demands as it had in 2014. Second, the conservative Peoples Party, the political party currently in power in Madrid, has shown itself to be particularly hostile to Catalan secession. But if the center-left PSOE returns to power in a future Spanish general election, we may see more accommodation given to Catalan nationalists. The PSOE have historically been friendlier towards Spain's national groups, as we saw with Prime Minister Zapatero's approval of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy. Only if Catalonia receives more autonomy, particularly over fiscal matters, do I expect demands for an independence referendum to recede.

Independence referendums are incredibly rare events so predicting when the next one will occur is a fruitless task. As of the writing of this thesis in March 2018, there is currently only one independence referendum scheduled for the future. Papua New Guinea promised the national-secession campaign in Bougainville that they would have the right to hold an independence referendum in June 2019. But the central government has already begun backsliding on the agreement by claiming Bougainville has not met

¹³⁰ Stewart, Walker, and Carrell. 2017

the proper pre-conditions.¹³¹ As this thesis has shown, gaining central government support for an independence referendum is a vital element for determining whether one is held or if the results matter. Understanding the factors which constrain the responses of central governments, therefore, is crucial to understanding new state formation in general. There is a high probability that the next sovereign state to emerge in the world will owe its creation to a central government which permitted it to hold an independence referendum.

¹³¹ Wyeth 2017

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