

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF DEVOLUTION  
REGIONALIZATION AND SECESSIONIST POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN  
EUROPE

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## ABSTRACT

Liam David Deering: Unintended Consequences of Devolution  
Regionalization and Secessionist Politics in Contemporary Western Europe  
(Under the direction of Robert M. Jenkins)

This thesis seeks to show that in a region with pre-existing secessionist sentiment, the creation of a regional legislative institution and an accompanied devolution of powers and competencies to this institution leads to a regionalization of the region's (and possibly central state's) party system. This regionalization of the party system fosters support for explicitly secessionist parties by providing them access to the government and to the media.

The process of devolution occurred in Catalonia, Flanders, and Scotland during the late twentieth century and continued into the twenty-first century. These three regions will act as evidence of this regionalization and the strengthening of secessionist parties as a result of the creation of a regional legislative institution and the subsequent devolution of powers and competencies.

To my family and close friends, thank you for your undying love and support.  
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## INTRODUCTION

Secessionism is one of the bigger threats to state sovereignty and the integrity of modern borders in today's world (Mulle, 2015; Wellman, 2012). Secessionist ideology in Western Europe has seen a resurgence over the last half century or so. Some of the most prominent Western European states are experiencing some sort of sub-state secessionist movement, including: Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Belgium (Beary, 2011; Beary, 2012; Coppieters, 2012). In the literature on secessionism, there is often confusion surrounding the difference between secessionism and separatism; some authors opting to refer to these Western European movements as separatist (Beary, 2011, 2012; Doyle, 2012; Wellman, 2012, etc.) whilst others classify them as secessionist (Anderson, 2004; Buchanan, 1995, 1997, 2004, Coppieters, 2012; McGarry, 1998; Norman, 1998 etc.). This paper accepts the distinction that is offered by Allen Buchanan (2004: 227); he argues that secession occurs when a region breaks away from a functioning state and separatism is when a region breaks away from a failing or failed state.

Three of the most active secessionist movements in Western Europe today are the Catalan, Flemish, and Scottish secessionist movements. All three of these regions – Catalonia, Flanders, and Scotland – have experienced a major act of devolution within the last half century. Devolution can take many different forms. In all three of these cases, and for the purposes of this study, devolution is defined as the creation of a recognized regional legislative institution and the allocation of various competencies and powers to this new institution that were previously held by the state<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> State, here, refers to the central state.

This paper seeks to show that in a sub-state region where there is a strong secessionist sentiment, the creation of an official regional legislative institution accompanied with a devolution of powers and competencies to this newly created regional institution leads to the regionalization<sup>2</sup> of the party system. This devolution and the regionalization of the party system creates an environment in which the secessionist movement can cement itself into the region's political system, strengthening its abilities to organize for a move towards secession.

The reasoning behind the major act of devolution in each of the three cases vary, but one significant component is the same: all three states witnessed pressure from a political organization (either a party or an 'underground' movement) to re-organize the region's position within the state. The Catalans, Flemish, and Scottish have differing experiences in terms of oppression they have experienced from their respective states. Spain, Belgium, and the United Kingdom also have distinctly different state structures, party systems, and electoral systems that play a role in understanding the effects of devolution in each case. Additionally, the manner in which support for secession and devolution was organized in each case is different, which is important to understanding how the creation of each regional legislative institution and its accompanying devolution of powers and competencies affected the party systems of each region and their secessionist movements. It is also important to understand the claims making of the three secessionist movements. Understanding this claims making can provide insight into what the movements want the most, allowing us to better comprehend how the creation of a regional legislative institution and a major act of devolution can affect their secessionist parties.

This thesis begins with a discussion of the existing literature in the field of devolution studies. This discussion will set up the theoretical framework through which the three case studies

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<sup>2</sup> Regionalization in terms of the dominance of the party system by regional parties rather than state-wide parties.



will be analyzed. This theoretical framework provides the basis for how a major act of devolution can regionalize a party system and strengthen secessionist parties.

The following section highlights the most important differences and similarities and institutional structures of the three regions prior to their major acts of devolution. This section is followed by a discussion on the devolution itself. This discussion entails a description of the regional legislative institution itself, the competencies and powers that were devolved, and an analysis of the regional (or secessionist) parties that were leading the charge during the devolution process.

The analysis of the post-devolution time periods in each case study is important as it helps us understand how the party systems were regionalized and how the secessionist movements were affected by both the devolution and this regionalization. This section of the paper will discuss the solidification of the regionalization of the party systems, a shift in claims making from the pre-devolution time period, and how the support for regional and secessionist parties has increased. Analyzing this claims making is important to understanding how this devolution and regionalization has affected the secessionist movements and their secessionist parties.

The breakdown of the analysis of devolution into pre-, during, and post-devolution sections allows for a better understanding of how this devolution affected the regional and secessionist parties and the movements. After this comprehensive analysis of the pre-devolution, devolution, and post-devolution time period has been completed for each case, the paper moves on to analyze how devolution in Western European liberal democracies with a region with a secessionist sentiment leads to a regionalization of the party system.

## **DEVOLUTION, REGIONALIZATION, AND SECESSIONISM**

### *The effects of devolution on the party system*

A push for devolution by a sub-state region with secessionist sentiments creates a serious dilemma for states. Should the state create a regional legislative institution for this region? Will devolving various powers to this region appease their claims for secession or will it just facilitate future moves towards secession?

Brancati (2008) argues that political decentralization, through the process of creating a regional legislative institution and devolving various powers and competencies to this newly created institution, greatly increases the strength of regional parties. Regional parties are more likely to succeed in both the national elections and in the elections to this new regional legislative institution. This decentralization, which in many cases manifests itself as a federalizing process (see: Law, 2012) (as in the Spanish and Belgian cases), creates an environment in which regional parties can operate more successfully than when they previously could only compete in national elections. Additionally, this newly created institution and its accompanying devolution allow regional factions of national parties to break off and compete in the regional elections as a regional party (Kyriacou and Morral-Palacín, 2014).

A major act of devolution, in a sub-state region with pro-secessionist sentiments, that involves the creation of a new regional legislative institution and the devolution of several powers and competencies, in effect, regionalizes the region's party system. Looking at the three cases – Catalonia, Flanders, and Scotland – it will become clear that the regions' party systems have been

regionalized. In some cases, such as Flanders, it is possible that this regionalization also occurs at the state level, where the national legislature is also dominated by regional parties.

The regionalization effect of creating a regional legislative institution and devolving powers to this institution is clear. The Catalan, Flemish, and Scottish cases all demonstrate how this major act of devolution changes the region's party system, shifting it away from state-wide parties and towards regional parties, representing the region's interests both at this new regional level and at the state level in the country's capital.

### *Regionalization's effects on secessionist movements*

The major act of devolution that involves the creation of a regional legislative institution and the devolution of several powers and competencies to this newly created institution leads to the regionalization of the region's (and sometimes state's) party system. This regionalization, which is characterized by the dominance of regional parties in regional (and even national) elections, strengthens both non-secessionist parties and pro-secessionist regional parties.

Just like non-secessionist regional parties, secessionist parties are better able to compete for seats at the regional level than at the national level. Their ability to gain more seats at the regional level grants them access to media resources, provides them a voice in a governmental setting, and allows them to use the tools and resources of the government to help the region (Kriacou and Morral-Palacín, 2014). All three of these advantages to being in the regional government help these secessionist parties grow in strength. Without this regional institution and its devolved powers, it would be very difficult for secessionist parties to get the topic of secession on any governmental agenda. When these parties are able to gain access to their regional government, they are able to ensure that the topic of secession is a talking point within the legislative institution. Putting secession into the official governmental discourse is very important

as it allows for more people to hear this secessionist message and also forces other parties to have some sort of discussion and take a stance on secession, something they otherwise likely would not have done.

Masseti and Schakel (2016) conducted a study in which they examined various regional and secessionist parties throughout the OECD world. They conclude that devolution does in fact increase the likelihood of the presence and strength of secessionist parties. They also argue that their presence in the government can force them to moderate their calls for secession but can also further their cause for secession by creating a political environment in which other parties must have a discussion about secession. This discussion is especially pertinent in a political environment in which regional parties are obtaining a lot of seats, as in these cases where a major act of devolution has occurred.

Masseti and Schakel (2016) also examine the variation amongst regional parties and why some regions have more secessionist parties than others. They find that areas that have a distinctively different language and culture are more likely to have secessionist regional parties than regions with the same language and a similar culture to the state's dominant nation. This finding holds true in the Catalan and Flemish cases but does not in the Scottish, who whilst speaking the same language as the rest of the United Kingdom, operate a strong secessionist movement.

The Catalan, Flemish, and Scottish secessionist movements have been able to promote their claims for secession through each of their respective regional legislative institutions. All three of these regional legislative institutions are now controlled by parties that are explicitly secessionist (JxSí in Catalonia, N-VA in Flanders, and the SNP in Scotland). The strength of these secessionist parties is largely due to the devolution that occurred. Secessionist parties are emboldened by their

ability to gain seats within these newly created regional legislative institutions (Brancati, 2008). The parties are able to operate full-scale campaigns for secession, putting the topic of secession on the talking agenda throughout the entire region.

The institutional legacy of each sub-state region with an active secessionist movement is important to understanding the current positioning of each region's regional and secessionist parties (Hopkin, 2009; Brancati, 2008). This institutional legacy includes the state structure, the history (or lack thereof) of oppressive behavior on the part of the state, voting structures, and prior party structures. After a major change in devolution, like the instances that occurred in Catalonia and Flanders throughout the 1970s and 1980s and in Scotland in the late 1990s, the regions' party systems become regionalized, creating an environment in which secessionist parties gain access to government and can increase their strength and influence. There are significant variations between the regional and secessionist parties in Catalonia, Flanders, and Scotland that can largely be attributed to the different institutional and political heritages of the regions and the differences in claims making of the institutions.

## **PRE-DEVOLUTION**

### *Legacy of Oppression*

Immediately following the Spanish Civil War, the victorious group, known as the “Francoists” sought to create a unified Spanish state that would project power domestically and internationally. In order to complete this hefty task, the Francoists rejected the use of any subnational (non-Spanish) languages and the practice of any subnational cultures. This rejection was especially pertinent in Catalonia because the Catalans constituted a relatively large, centralized, subnational culture. At this time, in the early 1930s, over eighty percent of the inhabitants in Catalonia spoke Catalan. This new regime, headed by Francisco Franco, claimed that they did not wish to totally eliminate the Catalan language and culture, deciding not to prohibit it from being utilized in society’s private spheres (Strubell, 1999).

The most intense period of intolerance towards the Catalans and their culture occurred between 1939 and 1945 (Dowling, 2013). During this time period, Franco and his regime executed thousands of influential and notorious Catalan individuals. The Franco regime believed that by oppressing the cultural and linguistic aspects that differentiated the Catalans from the Spaniards, he would be able to force them into assimilating to the Spanish culture, creating a “new era of cultural and political homogeneity” (Dowling, 2013). Oppression under the Franco regime was not unique to the Catalans, but what distinguishes the Catalans from the other oppressed regions of Spain is that the Catalans were specifically targeted for their cultural and linguistic composition, not simply their political opposition to the Franco government. Andrew Dowling (2013) claims that the Catalans were not just oppressed by the government, but that “Catalonia experienced a

cultural genocide.” Without a doubt, the several decades leading up to the death of Francisco Franco on 20 November 1975 were full of cultural, economic, and political oppression of the Catalan nation.

The modern-day Belgian state was formally founded in the year 1830, following a separation from the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> Following the achievement of Belgian independence in 1830, the French culture reigned hegemonic throughout this new Belgian state. At this time, there were two main regions in Belgium – Wallonia, in the south, and Flanders, in the north. Flanders was an economically less successful region of the state, where the economy was agrarian-based, with its largest industries having to do with the agricultural sector. Wallonia, during this period, became one of the first industrialized region of Europe, encountering a large economic boom (Brans et al., 2009).

Interestingly enough, at the time of Belgian independence, the Flemish population, based in Flanders, constituted a majority of the population of the state, around 57 percent of the total Belgian population. Today, the Flemish population accounts for about 60 percent of Belgium’s population (De Winter and Baudewyns, 2009). Despite the (Dutch-speaking) Flemish holding a demographic majority, the official language of Belgium for administrative, military, political, legal, educational, and media affairs was French, the language of the Walloon population. However, the Constitution of 1831 did grant the Flemish the right to use their language as long as French was recognized as the official language of the state, but the Constitution did limit the non-linguistic cultural rights of the Flemish (Loobuyck and Jacobs, 2009). Due to the hegemony of the French language in cultural, economic, and political life, the Belgian capital of Brussels, which is

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<sup>3</sup> It may not be very significant, but it is interesting to note that Belgium itself was formed via a secessionist movement in the not so distant past.

located within the Flemish territory<sup>4</sup>, slowly became a French-speaking city within a Dutch-speaking Flanders. The oppression and discrimination of the Flemish in Belgium was not nearly as severe as the oppression of the Catalans in Spain, but it was present nonetheless. It mostly presented itself in the form of linguistic and cultural oppression, as the Flemish were required to use the minority language, French, within official state business. Additionally, educational policies were created and executed through the central government in Brussels, allowing the Flemish little influence in the creation of their educational plans, which can have a large effect on cultural and linguistic aspects of society.

Whilst the Catalans were facing severe political, economic, and cultural oppression prior to devolution and the Flemish were experiencing some forms of cultural exclusion and subordination, the Scottish were not encountering such issues. Scotland and the central government of the United Kingdom have had a relatively cooperative history since their union in the seventeenth century. Scotland has been able to have its historical languages (Gaelic and Scots) recognized and utilized in any way the Scots see fit. The Scots have also been speaking the predominant language of the United Kingdom, English, for several centuries, meaning that linguistic issues were virtually nonexistent (Töngür, 2014). Politically speaking, the Scottish were allowed to vote and participate in British elections as much as anyone else was. It is important to remember when considering the differences in the history of oppression between Catalonia, Flanders, and Scotland, that Scotland is a part of a union, not a subordinate, subnational unit. The United Kingdom is made up of four regions (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales) that joined together to form a union. This is notably different than, for example, Spain wherein the

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<sup>4</sup> At the time, this was unofficial, as there was no official Flemish territory until the devolution process began in the 1970s.



central government in Spain rules over the autonomous communities (regional/federal units) in a federal manner, not in a voluntary union.

There are distinct differences between the levels (and types) of oppression that these three subnational groups have experienced in relation to their respective central governments. The Catalans experienced very harsh and severe oppression under the reign of General Francisco Franco that threatened not only their cultural and historical expression, but also threatened their very existence within the state. The Flemish experienced a long history of having their culture and language subordinated beneath the minority Walloon/French culture and language, making them feel less valued within the state (Loobuyck and Jacobs, 2009). Finally, the Scottish experienced very little oppression at the hands of the United Kingdom, of which they were a willing member of a union of nations.

### *State Structure*

Prior to the devolution that took place within Spain, Spain was in the process of transitioning from an authoritarian military led government to a democratic regime. During the rule of General Franco, the Spanish government operated from a centralized military command in which virtually no decisions were made below the top, centralized level. Following the death of Franco on 20 November 1975, a parliamentary monarchy was established (Dowling, 2013).

The development and implementation of democracy in Spain was not a simple and quick process. The Spanish chose to create a federalized democracy that would be composed of seventeen *comunidades autónomas* (autonomous communities – the regional/federal units). One of these seventeen *comunidades* was Catalonia. The *Cortes Generales* was created as the top Spanish legislative institution and was to be elected by all citizens of Spain, with its representatives representing their *comunidad* in the capital, Madrid.

In Belgium, before the devolution and federalization project commenced, the state operated as a centralized government that was headquartered in the capital, Brussels. During this time period, prior to 1970, the Belgian government operated with no semblance of federalism or any type of decentralized decision-making processes (Fitzmaurice, 1996). The only way for the Flemish to push their political agenda was for them to do so via the centralized Belgian Parliament in Brussels. The Walloons and other (small) groups within Belgium were also represented in such a way, creating a lot of tension as there was a conglomeration of different groups' interests coming together in one legislative body.

All four regions of the United Kingdom are represented in the state's capital, London. The British Parliament in Westminster is comprised of members from all four regions. The four regions of the United Kingdom, at this time, had no other legislative bodies other than some small country level elected positions that held little power or influence. Nearly all governing decisions were made in London in a political setting that was undoubtedly dominated by the largest region (by far), England.

The structure of the state in which the Catalans, Flemish, and Scottish resided prior to their respective time periods of devolution varied. The Catalans were enduring a time of democratization in Spain, in which a federal government was being established and a Spanish party system was emerging. The Flemish, on the other hand, resided in Belgium, which was a fully centralized state with no federal composition. The Scottish were also in a different situation as they were a part of a union of four nations,<sup>5</sup> wherein nearly all decisions were taken centrally in London.

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<sup>5</sup> This relationship differs from Catalonia and Flanders. Both Catalonia and Flanders were subordinate to their respective central governments as territories of the state; Scotland is not a territory of the United Kingdom but is rather a member of the union. This is an important rhetorical difference.

### *Party system and voting structure*

During the reign of General Francisco Franco, political parties were essentially non-existent as the military, under Franco's control, ruled the government and squashed any potential threat to its power. Following his 1975 death, a Spanish party system started to develop as Spain began the path towards democratization. The first elections in Spain occurred on 15 June 1977, less than two years after Franco's death (Dowling, 2013). The newly written Spanish Constitution provided for these elections to operate based upon system of proportional representation in which universal suffrage to all Spanish citizens, above the legal voting age of 18, applies. These elections featured four main parties: the Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD), the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), and the Popular Alliance (AP) (Story, 2007). Two major regional parties also developed: the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) and the Democratic Pact for Catalonia (PDC) (Story, 2007).

Prior to the federalization of Belgium, there were significantly fewer political parties than there are today in federalized Belgium. Some of the most prominent political parties during this pre-federalized period and during the beginning of the federalization project include: the Christian People's Party, the Socialist Party, the People's Union, and the PRL-FDF (Liberal Reformist Party – Democratic Front of Francophones). Additionally, some regional parties were gaining strength, especially in Flanders, including: Flemish Liberals and Democrats and the Flemish Block. (Deschouwer, 2012). Similar to Spain, the Belgian legislature was, and still is, elected based upon a system of proportional representation. It is also important to note that voting is mandatory in Belgium, unsurprisingly producing some of the highest voter turnout rates in the entire world (Deschouwer, 2012). This means that all parties, including regional and secessionist parties, need to focus less energy than parties in other countries where voting is not mandatory on getting people

to vote, and can exert more of their effort on influencing people to support their platform and vote for their party.

Two years prior to the creation of the modern Scottish Parliament in 1999, the British government held its general election. The three main parties competing in this election cycle and for several prior elections were: the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, and the Liberal Democratic Party. Whilst the Spanish and Belgians utilize a system of proportional representation in their electoral systems, the United Kingdom opts for an electoral system based upon plurality (of first past the post) voting. In such a system, it is considerably more difficult for small political parties to gain any serious influence in the Parliament. In the United Kingdom, where a party obtains its votes is often more important than the amount of votes it receives. Due to this system, the British Parliament had been dominated by two parties (Labour and Conservative) for several decades. In these 1997 elections, the Labour Party earned a decisive victory, leading to the government of Prime Minister Tony Blair (Töngür, 2014). Whilst the Labour and Conservative parties tended to dominate the British political scene, the Liberal Democrats often earned enough seats to play some sort of role in the government.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, however, the Scottish National Party (SNP), which has been active since the 1920s, had been unable to gain any seats in Westminster as the Labour Party had historically dominated the Scottish electorate.

The party system and the structure of the electoral system in each one of these states is important for understanding the strength of the regional party systems that develop through the process of devolution in each case. In Catalonia, democracy was very new so there was not a very strong party system prior to devolution. The system that was in place was primarily dominated by Spanish-wide parties but regional parties were beginning to develop. In Flanders, experience with

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<sup>6</sup> Although it should be noted that a coalition involving the Liberal Democratic party was quite rare.

democracy was far from new but with the centralized system and the proportional representative electoral procedures, the Belgian Parliament was dominated by Belgian wide parties. Although, like in Catalonia, regional parties were present, just not strong. Scotland, who has had an extensive history with democracy within the United Kingdom, operated within a plurality based electoral system which was dominated by British parties. Most notably, the Labour Party found a lot of success historically in Scotland. The main regional party, the Scottish National Party (SNP) has been active since the 1920s but had not been able to garner any seats in Westminster due to the plurality system and the popularity of the Labour Party within Scotland.

### *Claims making of the secessionist movements*

The claims that secessionist movements make for secession are important to understanding how they operate and how they foresee any possible future independence. Prior to devolution in Catalonia, the claims that the Catalan secessionist movement were primarily focused on cultural issues as well as some economic issues. Obviously, cultural issues were very important to the Catalans as their culture and language were significantly and harshly targeted by the Franco regime. Cultural, in this sense, refers more specifically to linguistic and identity politics and policies. The practice and expression of the Catalan culture and the use of the Catalan language were forbidden for several decades, whilst education policies were centrally controlled and administered in Madrid. Throughout the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, a cultural transformation, that was a result of the changing political culture in Spain and the oppressiveness of the Franco regime, was occurring in Catalonia (Dowling, 2013). This process presented itself in the form of folkloric regionalism, high cultural expressions of Catalan culture, and ‘underground’ Catalan literature and expressions of visual and performing arts. This cultural transformation helped resolve divisions that existed within the Catalan opposition to the Spanish

government. This transformation also produced an ‘underground’ environment in which political organizers could gather to discuss aspects of Catalan secessionism without interference from the oppressive Franco regime (see: Dowling, 2013).

Additionally, the Catalans were unhappy with the economic situation in a struggling Spain leaving an authoritarian regime. Barcelona was one of Europe’s busiest and most profitable ports but the economic and fiscal policies running this region and city were controlled by Madrid, not Barcelona. Madrid had ‘always’ been the political and administrative center and capital of the modern Spanish state but Barcelona had grown to become Spain’s financial and industrial center. The power of Barcelona became a way for the Catalans to expose Spaniards and people from all around the world to their culture. Catalonia’s large economic output required markets outside of Catalonia. Throughout the 1980s and into the mid-1990s, Spain acted as the largest market for the sale of Catalan products (and services) (Dowling, 2013). The Spanish economy was struggling during the democratic transition period and these economic issues became another form of grievance claiming of the Catalan secessionist movement, although their primary claims at this time remained cultural in nature.

The claims of the Flemish secessionist movement prior to the period of federalization and devolution largely centered on cultural issues, similar to Catalonia, but also incorporated some political claims. The Flemish argued that they were not able to culturally flourish because of the subordination that their language suffered to that of the Walloons within the Belgian state (de Winter and Baudewyns, 2009). Linguistic issues were a large part of the Flemish secessionist movement’s claims making prior to the federalization of the country. Economic issues became more and more prevalent in Flanders as Flanders had attracted a lot of new industry after the Second World War, and these new industries were just starting to boom. Meanwhile, Wallonia’s

economy, which was heavily based on the production of steel and coal, started to decline.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly enough, the Flemish members of Belgian Parliament did not try to exploit their position as the majority in the Parliament, and did not steer the Belgian state towards further promotion of Flemish interests (Deschouwer, 2012). Instead, it sought devolution of certain cultural competencies to the regional level. Whilst economic issues were important to the Flemish, they did not become a major part of the claims making of the secessionist movement.

The Flemish did have political concerns that became a part of their claims making, although still not to the extent that cultural and linguistic issues were. The Flemish secessionist movement argued that the Flemish were not properly represented within the Belgian state (Fitzmaurice, 1996). If the Flemish were a majority of the population of the country, they should at least have a majority of the influence in the capital and should not be politically inferior to a minority population. This situation was especially pertinent when considering the history of the favoritism that the Belgian state showed towards the Walloons and the Francophones over the Flemish since its independence from the Netherlands.

Prior to the period of devolution that occurred within the United Kingdom, the claims making of the Scottish secessionist movement primarily focused on political issues. Many Scots felt that the United Kingdom did not provide the Scottish a fair say in the actions and decisions of the government. The concept of “why should Scots be forced to send their children off to a war that they don’t support that was launched by a party [Conservative] that Scotland has never supported?” played quite heavily in the discourse surrounding Scottish secessionism (Töngür, 2014). The fact that British politics were dominated by the English, who tend to vote much more

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<sup>7</sup> Belgium’s membership in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, undoubtedly contributed, at least in part, to the economic decline in Wallonia. Due to the ECSC, the Walloon industries had to compete with the French and German industries (Deschouwer, 2012).

conservatively than the Scottish, was a major concern of the Scots and was one of their main claims for secession.

The Catalan, Flemish, and Scottish secessionist movements had varying types of claims for independence prior to the periods of devolution that occurred within their respective states. The Catalan claims primarily centered around cultural issues but also incorporated some key economic issues as well. The Flemish claims were mostly focused upon cultural and linguistic issues whilst also involving various important political aspects. The Scottish claims were a bit different, as cultural claims were less relevant due to the high level of cultural and linguistic similarity that the Scots experienced within the United Kingdom. Scottish claims heavily focused on political issues surrounding their representation, influence, and the decision making processes within the state.

#### *Support and organization for secession*

Prior to the death of General Francisco Franco in 1975, showing public support for Catalan secession was very risky. In an undemocratic, authoritarian regime that suppressed minority populations and nations, such as the Catalans, mass, public organization of a secessionist movement in Catalonia prior to Franco's death was essentially impossible. Instead, the Catalan movement needed to operate in an 'underground' manner (see: Dowling, 2013). The repression of public organization and endorsement of secession and the lack of Spanish democracy meant that there was no political party championing the Catalan case for secession during this time period. This 'underground' movement, however, was active, as Catalan cultural and intellectual elites promoted the possibility of Catalan secession. Catalan autonomy became an important topic of discussion amongst many Catalans (Dowling, 2013; Serrano, 2013), but was not something that was organized on a mass level until after the death of General Franco and during the process of Spanish democratization and federalization.



Support for secessionist parties in Flanders prior to the devolution in Belgium was minimal due to the fact that there were not any serious, strongly organized secessionist parties competing in the Belgian political scene. There were, at times, Flemish (and Walloon) parties in the Belgian Parliament, but they did not garner a lot of votes and did not play a large role in the formation of the government or in the development of important legislation. Support for devolution was strong amongst Flemish members of Belgian Parliament and amongst much of the Flemish electorate (Deshouwer, 2012; de Winter and Baudewyns, 2009). This support became evident during the solidification of the Flemish party system, which included Flemish secessionist parties, that occurred following the initial devolution and the federalization process in Belgium that began in 1970.

Unlike in Catalonia and Flanders, Scotland had a pro-independence party long before the devolution that occurred within the United Kingdom. The Scottish National Party (SNP), which has been a secessionist party since its beginnings in the 1920s, had varying levels of support from the Scottish electorate and population throughout the twentieth century. As previously discussed, the party had a difficult time competing with the Labour Party for votes within Scotland, but its presence in the campaigns provided the SNP with media attention and access to information channels throughout Scotland for several decades preceding the devolution in the late 1990s. This media attention and access was not available to the Catalan and Flemish secessionist movements in the same way as the Scottish because there was no party (for varying reasons) championing the cause for independence prior to their respective periods of devolution. While the support for this Scottish secessionist party was not strong in comparison to some of the other parties in Scotland throughout this pre-devolution time period, the party was centrally organized, well established,

and had media and information connections that it could use to promote the cause of Scottish independence and the push for devolution.

The organization of the pro-secessionist movements in Catalonia, Flanders, and Scotland were all very different from one another in the time periods preceding their respective experiences with devolution. That Catalans had little to no vocal, mass, public support or organization for secession or autonomy due to the lack of democracy and freedom of expression. Oppression meant that the organization and discussions regarding any possible secession or future devolution must occur in an ‘underground’ manner. In Flanders, this type of oppression was not an issue and free discussion was possible. There was no pro-secessionist party relevantly competing within Belgian politics, despite the presence of a few regional parties. Public support for autonomy and secession was present in Flanders and became even more noticeable with the solidification of the Flemish party system during the devolution and federalization processes. Scotland had a very different situation due to the fact that they had a pro-independence party that has been active since the 1920s, around 70 years prior to the period of devolution and the creation of the Scottish Parliament. This experience with the secessionist SNP party was important because the SNP had access to media and information channels due to its organization and established position.

## DEVOLUTION

### *Establishment of the regional legislative institution*

*El Parlament de Catalunya* (the Parliament of Catalonia) was originally founded in 1932, but was exiled between the years 1939 and 1975 under the authoritarian military regime in Spain, in which democratic institutions were prohibited (Dowling, 2013). The death of General Francisco Franco in November 1975 led to a period of democratization in Spain. The democratization process in Spain in the late 1970s involved the creation of a federalized Spanish state. As a part of this federalization process, seventeen *comunidades autónomas* were recognized and regional legislative institutions were created. In Catalonia, this meant the return of *El Parlament de Catalunya* (*El Parlament*).

The Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia of 1979 officially recognized the return of *El Parlament* (see: Strubell, 1999; Atkinson, 1999; Rex, 1999). *El Parlament de Catalunya* is a unicameral regional legislative body comprised of 135 members. Elections for *El Parlament de Catalunya* are held every four years. *El Parlament* is tasked with electing the President of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, passing Catalan legislation, and to approve and pass the budget of the autonomous community of Catalonia (Sobrequés et al., 2005).

*El Parlament* held its first elections since its banishment on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1980. In these elections, the Convergence and Union (CiU) received 27.8 percent of the vote (43 seats), the Socialists' Party of Catalonia (PSC) received 22.4 percent of the vote (33 seats), and the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC) received 5.6 percent of the vote (25 seats) (Sureda, 2005). It

is important to note that the parties receiving the greatest amount of seats are Catalan parties, not Spanish-wide, state-level parties.

The process of federalization in Belgium was not quick. Federalization and its accompanying devolution of powers and competencies are institutionally very difficult to facilitate from the ground up. From the beginning of the process to the point where the federal units were fully functional and recognized by the Belgian Constitution took a little over 22 years (Swenden and Jans, 2009).

The Belgian government, under severe pressure from the years of campaigning and petitioning by Flemish members of Belgian Parliament, began this process of devolution and federalization in 1970 with the formal recognition of ‘language communities’. Three language communities were officially recognized: Flemish, Francophone, and German speaking (Brans et al., 2009; Deshouwer, 2012). As a part of this process, the *Vlaamse Raad* (the Flemish Council) was created. The *Vlaamse Raad* met for the first time on 7 December 1971 as a part of the beginning of the federalization of Belgium. The federalization process and devolution continued into 1980 when the Belgian government agreed upon the operationalization of two distinct regions with legislative powers – Wallonia and Flanders. The recognition of these two communities, which would later be joined by a third (the capital region of Brussels) in 1989, led to the creation of regional parliaments. The *Vlaamse Raad* officially became the *Vlaamse Parlement* (the Flemish Parliament) in 1995. Some scholars (Fitzmaurice, 1996; Deshouwer, 2012). argued to have marked the completion of the federalization of Belgium.

The *Vlaamse Parlement* is comprised of 124 directly elected representatives that represent the Flemish nation at the regional level in Belgium. The *Vlaamse Parlement* is tasked with passing Flemish laws within their devolved competencies, approving the Flemish regional budget, and

organizing and administering the Flemish government (Deschouwer, 2012). The *Vlaamse Volksvertegenwoordigers*, or Members of Flemish Parliament (MFPs), have been directly elected since 1995. The first elections to the *Vlaamse Parlement* occurred in 1995. In these elections, the Christian Democratic and Flemish Party (CD&V) won 37 seats, the Flemish Liberals and Democrats (VLD) won 27, the Socialist Party (SP) won 26, and the Flemish Block won 17 (Vermessen, 1995). Similar to the results that the Catalans saw in their first regional elections, the regional parties dominated the first elections to the *Vlaamse Parlement*.

The desire for Scottish independence existed throughout the twentieth century and began growing in the late 1960s. Since there already existed a pro-independence party in Scotland (SNP), the mobilization for independence in the early 1970s was very easily facilitated. This mobilization, which was not very large but was “loud” enough to be recognized by the British government, resulted in a legal referendum on devolution of British powers to Scotland on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1979. The referendum was a success, with approximately 51 percent of Scots (that participated in the referendum) voting for the implementation of the 1978 Scotland Act (Töngür, 2014). The referendum led to the devolution of some minor powers (mostly focused on educational policy autonomy) from the British government to localized Scottish governments, but the referendum failed to create a Scottish Assembly or a Scottish Parliament, meaning that any further devolution of powers to “Scotland” would be very difficult.

One factor that pushed the Scots even further towards the idea of independence was the rule of Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher and the Conservative Party, which began ruling in 1979, implemented neoliberal policies and attempted to make large cuts to the British welfare state. These two policy decisions have historically been very unpopular in

Scotland, and proved to be significant grievances of the Scottish secessionist movement during the Thatcher government (Stewart, 2009; Töngür, 2014).

The Scotland Act of 1978 and the government of Margaret Thatcher pushed the Scots further towards greater autonomy. This push for autonomy brought about another referendum on 11 September 1979. This referendum was a question about the creation of a Scottish Parliament. Over 74 percent of voters voted in favor of creating a Scottish Parliament and the referendum triggered the Scotland Act of 1978, creating the modern Scottish Parliament (Töngür, 2014). The Scottish Parliament, or *Pàrlamaid na h-Alba* as it is named in Gaelic or *The Scots Pairlament* as it is called in Scots, is a unicameral legislative body comprised of 129 seats that are directly elected every four years on the basis of proportional representation, unlike the British elections which use a plurality electoral system.

The inaugural elections to the modern Scottish Parliament resulted in the Labour Party winning 56 seats, the Scottish National Party (SNP) winning 35, The Conservative Party winning 18, and the Liberal Democratic Party winning 17. It is important to note, here, that the party garnering the greatest amount of seats was a British party, not a Scottish regional party. This is in contrast to the inaugural elections to the Catalan and Flemish regional legislative institutions where the regional parties were more successful.

#### *Competencies and powers devolved*

The devolution of competencies and powers to the regional level that accompanied the creation of these aforementioned regional legislative institutions is critical to the functioning of the institutions and is important to the parties that take control of these regional governments. Importantly, the devolution that occurred from the Spanish government to *El Parlament de Catalunya* included the devolution of educational policies. The Catalans received the right to teach

in their own language and promote their own unique culture and heritage through this educational system. Additionally, several other cultural rights and competencies were devolved to the Catalans, allowing the Catalans to make decisions for themselves when it comes to issues such as: regional holidays, official language and usage, ceremonies, etc. (Burg, 2015).

Very few economic and financial competencies were devolved to the regional level in Spain. Most economic policies are still made by the *Cortes Generales* meaning that Catalonia still has little influence over its own economic and financial issues. In terms of political issues, the most important devolution was the creation of *El Parlament* itself. This new institution allows the Catalans to have their own government in which their issues can be discussed. Whilst their ability to gain more direct influence in Madrid has not changed as their seats are constrained by the size of their population relative to that of Spain, *El Parlament* and its new competencies allow the Catalans to make many decisions for themselves that they had previously not been able to do. This decision-making power is especially important in the area of cultural issues, which, as previously discussed, was an area of secessionist claims making that was very important to the Catalans prior to this devolution.

The devolution of powers and competencies within Belgium occurred over time, throughout the twenty two year process of federalization. The first major round of devolution occurred in 1980. In 1980, the competencies that were devolved to Flanders included: employment policy, public investment management, economic development policy, housing policy, and structural and urban planning (Brans et al., 2009). Further powers were devolved in 1989, including: scientific research initiatives and transportation policy. In 1993, even more competencies were devolved to the regional level, including: social assistance policies and even

some aspects of foreign policy (Brans et al., 2009; Beyers et al., 2009).<sup>8</sup> These competencies became even more important when the *Vlaamse Raad* became the *Vlaamse Parlement* in 1995 and the Flemish people were directly electing parties to manage these competencies. In 1992, a major constitutional change took place. The Belgian Constitution officially recognized Belgium as a federal state for the first time, acknowledging the powers of the three distinct regions and the three language communities (Brans et al., 2009; Billiet et al., 2009).

Most of the powers and competencies that have been devolved from the United Kingdom to Scotland occurred in conjunction with the 1999 creation of the Scottish Parliament. Scotland, via their new parliament, had several powers devolved to it, including: educational and training policies, local governing, social working, housing policies, tourism control, sports legislation, forestry and fishing, and several aspects of transportation within Scotland (Buchanan, C., 2007a; Buchanan, C., 2007b; Töngür, 2014). It should be noted, however, that these devolved powers do nothing to directly change the level of Scottish representation<sup>9</sup> in Westminster, one of the most significant secessionist claims of the Scottish secessionist movement and the Scottish National Party.

#### *Parties in control / leading the charge*

Much of the Catalan secessionist movement prior to the death of General Franco in 1975 was not a part of the popular discourse. This ‘underground’ nature of the movement was due to the lack of the ability to strongly and publicly organize in the face of Franco’s oppressive regime and the lack of democratic parties in the autocratic state of Spain. Following Franco’s death and

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<sup>8</sup> i.e. Ratifying treaties and negotiating on behalf of regional interests at the European level.

<sup>9</sup> With little exception, the only people voting for Scottish parties (primarily the SNP) are Scottish. The Scottish have a limited amount of districts represented in Westminster. Without expanding the size of Scotland relative to the United Kingdom, there is essentially a cap on how many seats a regional Scottish party can obtain.



during the Spanish transition from autocracy to democracy, the Spanish party system began to take form. During this formation, the Catalan secessionist movement was able to organize itself through this party system, which included a few Catalan regional parties. Most important for leading the charge for devolution during this time period was the *Convergència i Unió* party (CiU) (see: Dowling, 2013). The CiU was not a secessionist party during this transition period but was an organized party pushing for increased Catalan autonomy. The party promoted a platform of creating a Catalonia with increased autonomy that would unify the decimated Catalan nation *within* Spain (Dowling, 2013). Devolution in Spain, as noted, was not exclusive to the Catalans as it was occurring during a time of democratization and federalization throughout the whole state.

It would be incorrect to say that there was one specific political party in Flanders that was leading the charge for devolution in Belgium. Prior to the beginning of this federal project in 1970, Flemish regional parties had very little success in the Belgian general elections. Much of the pressure that the Belgian government was coming from a large social movement that took place in the Flemish public sphere and debate as well as from the Flemish members of Belgian Parliament within various political parties (Deschouwer, 2012; Peters, 2009). The main parties in Belgium (including the Christian Social Party, Belgian Socialist Party, and the Party for Freedom and Progress) were feeling pressure over the growing discussion over Flemish autonomy and secession.

Following the creation of the *Vlaamse Raad* and the beginning of the federalization project in Belgium, the Flemish regional parties began organizing in a more structured manner, splitting along political ideological lines amongst themselves and amongst linguistic lines from the Walloon

parties, creating an asymmetrical<sup>10</sup> federalized and regionalized party system. The parties also began solidifying their stances on devolution and secessionism.

As the federalization process continued throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, support for Belgian parties declined and support for regional parties (in both Flanders and Wallonia) grew. Similar in ways to Catalonia, it was not a single, organized political party that was pushing for this secession; rather, it was an organized public movement in favor of changing the status quo combined with pressure from Flemish members of Belgian Parliament that led to this devolution (Deschouwer, 2012; Swenden and Jans, 2009). It was following the change in devolution that the Flemish parties, including the secessionist parties, truly solidified and began growing in strength amongst the Flemish electorate.

In both the Catalan and Flemish cases, there was not a single party leading the charge for devolution or for secession during the period of devolution and federalization that occurred within both states. In Scotland, this is not the case. The Scottish National Party (SNP) led the charge for devolution and the creation of the Scottish Parliament. The SNP was virtually the only regional party that represented Scotland. The party faced its biggest electoral competition from the British parties, most notably the Labour Party, not from another regional party. In Catalonia and Flanders, the regional parties had to contend with other regional parties for votes, whereas in Scotland, this was not the case. Due to the obvious electoral restraints that the SNP faces due to its regionalization within the Scottish electorate, it is very difficult for the party to gain an influential amount of seats in Westminster. The creation of the Scottish Parliament, however, created another outlet of

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<sup>10</sup> In a symmetrical federalized party system, the parties would cooperate with ideologically similar parties across the language or ethnic border whilst in an asymmetrical federalized party system, the parties are split by the linguistic or ethnic divide that splits parties from their ideological counterparts (Billiet et al., 2009; Swenden and Jans, 2009). In an asymmetrical system, a Flemish social democratic party is more likely to cooperate with a conservative party than with a Walloon social democratic party. This phenomenon is not unique to Belgium; a strong comparison can be made to the asymmetric party system that existed in the Former Yugoslavia (de Winter et al., 2009; Bunce, 1998). Refer to de Winter et al. (2009) for a more thorough discussion on this comparison.

influence for the SNP. The SNP could focus its attention on earning seats in Edinburgh's *Holyrood*<sup>11</sup> rather than exclusively focusing on a 'losing battle' in Westminster. It is clear, though, that the SNP had a lot of influence, by bringing Scottish issues to the forefront of the Scottish population and to the British government in Westminster, in the devolution process as a representative of the Scottish secessionist movement (see: Töngür, 2014).

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<sup>11</sup> The Scottish Parliament.

## POST-DEVOLUTION

### *Regional parties and secessionist parties*

Today, several decades following the democratization of Spain and the devolution that occurred with regards to Catalonia, there are over ten Catalan parties that operate within the Catalan political arena and there are also several Spanish-wide parties that also garner votes in Catalonia. Some of the more prominent Catalan regional parties in the post-devolution time period include: the Convergence and Union (CiU) (which dissolved in 2015), Together for Yes (JxSí) (formed following the 2012 elections as a coalition of pro-independence parties, including the CiU), the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), Catalan Solidarity for Independence (SI), and the Socialists' Party of Catalonia (PSC-PSOE).

The Flemish party system solidified following the federalization of Belgium and subsequent regionalization of the country's party system. Some of the most prominent Flemish regional parties include: New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), Christian Democratic and Flemish (CD&V), Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats (Open Vld), Socialist Party Different (sp.a), and the Flemish Interest. The subject of secession and Flemish independence has become an increasingly important aspect of the party system, although essentially every major Flemish party is pushing for further devolution and greater Flemish autonomy. The N-VA and the *Vlaams Belang* are pro-secessionist parties; their support often tends to follow other Flemish parties who support further devolution and increased autonomy within Belgium in lieu of secession.

There is not as much of a Scottish party system as there is in Catalonia and Flanders. In the time following the devolution that occurred within the United Kingdom and the creation of the

Scottish Parliament, the Scottish National Party (SNP) confirmed itself as a political force within Scotland. The SNP is undoubtedly the strongest Scottish regional party and is the only one who has achieved any measurable electoral success. Support for the SNP has been growing at quite a rapid rate since the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, further asserting the SNP as not just the voice of the Scottish secessionist movement but now as the voice of the Scottish electorate.

### *Changing claims of the movement*

In the origins of the Catalan secessionist movement, the movement sought independence on the basis of protecting the Catalan nation's culture, language, and identity. Following the creation of *El Parlament de Catalunya* and its accompanying devolution of competencies in the 1970s and 1980s, the issue of protecting the Catalan identity became less important. The devolution in Spain created this Catalan regional government that was allowed the competencies to legislate over identity, linguistic, cultural, and educational issues. Once these original claims for secession based upon cultural and linguistic grievances were more or less settled,<sup>12</sup> the Catalan secessionist movement, spearheaded by the *Convergència i Unió* (CiU), moved a lot of its claims towards the economic grievances that many Catalans believed that they were enduring as a consequence of their presence within the Spanish state (Burg, 2015; Dowling, 2013).

As previously mentioned, Barcelona has grown to become the banking and financial sector of Spain (Dowling, 2013). The often claim that the Spanish government operates a taxation and distribution of wealth system that disadvantages Catalonia, its businesses, and its economic growth potential (Dowling, 2013; Burg, 2015). *El Parlament* has few competencies in the areas of economic and finances with most decisions being made in Madrid. These economic grievances

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<sup>12</sup> Historic *Catalanism* (~1933 – 1970-80s) made claims for the protection of the Catalan language and culture, and modern *Catalanism* (1980s – onward) makes claims for economic, fiscal, and political independence. Historic *Catalanism* triumphed and accordingly, the goals of the Catalan national movement changed (Burg, 2015).

have become central to the claims making of the Catalan secessionist movement in the post-devolution time period (see Dowling, 2013).

The initial claims of the Flemish secessionist movement were both cultural and political in nature. Culturally and linguistically, the Flemish argued that they were not treated fairly because the official language of the government was that of the minority French speaking population and because they felt that the Walloons were politically advantaged in the government (Beyers and Bursen, 2009; Deschouwer, 2012). Similar to what occurred in Catalonia, the creation of the *Vlaamse Parlement* and the subsequent devolution of competencies to the regional level in Belgium allowed the Flemish to administer their own policies over the areas of culture, language, and education. This devolution effectively alleviated many of the problems that the Flemish had previously felt.

The Flemish also claimed that they were disadvantaged politically by their position within Belgium. In the sense, a majority of the country was not receiving a majority of the representation in the government and many Flemish claimed that they should be making decisions for themselves, not in conjunction with the Walloons (Beyers and Bursen, 2009; Deschouwer, 2012). The Flemish secessionist movement transitioned its secessionist claims making from predominantly cultural claims to political claims for autonomy and self-rule as the devolution process proceeded. The need for the cultural and linguistic claims for secession and autonomy became increasingly irrelevant so these political claims took precedence within the movement.

The claims for secession of the modern Scottish secessionist movement have primarily focused upon political issues. The Scottish have argued that they are not appropriately represented within the United Kingdom and that their voices are neither heard nor respected in Westminster. The union of the nations within the United Kingdom is being seen less and less favorably by many

Scots because they believe that the political system and the decision-making processes within the United Kingdom are dominated by the English, leaving little room for Scottish influence (Mack, 2007; Keating, 2010; Töngür, 2014). The creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and the accompanying devolution did not change the nature of these claims.

The claims of the Scottish secessionist movement, under the leadership of the Scottish National Party (SNP), continued to strongly be for secession. The devolution that occurred within the United Kingdom did little nothing to alleviate the main claims for secession that the movement had been making prior to devolution. This is, of course, in contrast to the Catalan and Flemish cases where the devolution processes in each country helped alleviate some of their main claims. The alleviation of some of the main claims in these two cases is likely due to the nature of the claims being cultural rather than purely political in nature. Cultural and linguistic issues are seemingly easier for a government to act in a manner that would appease the demands of the movement, whereas political issues involving the structure of the government and the amount of representation that a group receives within the government are much more difficult to change.

The British Parliament still, to this day, needs to approve the budget that the Scottish Parliament operates with every year and at any point the government in Westminster can revoke and of the competencies delegated to Scotland. These issues are serious concerns for the SNP and the Scottish secessionist movement, helping maintain their claims for secession on the basis of political issues and their lack of representation in the government of the United Kingdom.

#### *Support for secession and regional parties*

The inaugural elections to *El Parlament de Catalunya* in 1980 saw the Convergence and Union (CiU) receive 27.8 percent of the vote (43 seats), the Socialists' Party of Catalonia (PSC) receive 22.4 percent of the vote (33 seats), and the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC)

receive 5.6 percent of the vote (25 seats) (Sureda, 2005). As discussed previously, none of these parties were explicitly secessionist at the time.

The 2012 elections to *El Parlament* were focused around one primary issueL the relationship between Spain and Catalonia. The Republican Right of Catalonia – Yes Catalonia (ERC), the Solidarity for Independence (SI), and the CiU were in favor of secession, while the PSC-PSOE was largely split on the issue (Pujadas and Xifra, 2014). In these 2012 Catalan elections, recording the highest turnover ever in the history Catalan Parliamentary elections (Burg, 2015; Dowling, 2013), the CiU won 38.4% of the vote (62 seats), PSC won 14.4\$ of the vote (20 seats), the ERC won 13.7% of the vote (21 seats), People’s Party of Catalonia (PPC) won 13.0% of the vote (19 seats), and notably *Ciudadanos* (‘Citizens’ – a Spanish party) won 7.6% of the vote (9 seats) (Martí, 2013).

The pro-secessionist parties in Catalonia in 2012, notably the CiU and the ERC, did well electorally, in a way that they had not done in the past. The success of regional parties and, more specifically, pro-secessionist parties, dominated the Catalan elections in 2012.

In January 2013, the new Catalan (CiU led) government issued a “Declaration of Sovereignty,” that defined Catalonia as a “sovereign political subject” (Burg, 2015). The Spanish Constitutional Court would overturn this declaration in March 2014, with the announcement by the Court that only “Spanish people” could enjoy sovereignty (Burg, 2015). The following month, in April 2014, the *Cortes Generales* rejected the Catalans request to hold a referendum on independence. However, in May the Catalans began preparing for the referendum against the will of the *Cortes Generales* (Burg, 2015). The Spanish Constitutional Court suspended the referendum in October of 2014, claiming that it was unconstitutional.



Despite the Court's rulings, on 9 November 2014, the Catalans held an unofficial referendum. Turnout for this unofficial vote was very low, but 80.76% of those that voted, voted in favor of independence (Burg, 2015). It is plausible that we can attribute the low levels of voter participation to the fact that the referendum was unofficial and that the results could not directly result in independence. This vote can be viewed as somewhat symbolic, but it should not be viewed as insignificant as it is an example of how the Catalan secessionist movement has grown and changed since the beginning of the devolution process in the 1970s.

Elections took place again in Catalonia in 2015. These elections saw the Together for Yes (JxSí) win a commanding 39.6% of the vote (62 seats), *Ciudadanos* (a Spanish-wide party with many Catalan members) win 17.9% of the vote (25 seats), and PSC receive 12.7% of the vote (16 seats) (Rawlinson, 2015). It is important to notice that the CiU had dissolved and did not compete in the election, but rather that the party merged into the JxSí with other pro-secessionist minded groups. The JxSí is a party coalition that is pushing for Catalan independence.

Just as in 2012, the 2015 Catalan Parliamentary elections indicated a large basis of support for secession in terms of electoral behavior in Catalonia. It is interesting to note, however, that the state-wide, Spanish party, *Ciudadanos* gained a lot more votes in 2015 than they had in 2012. It is clear, now, several decades following the creation of *El Parlament de Catalunya* and the processes of democratization and devolution that occurred within Spain, that Catalan regional parties, including secessionist parties, dominate contemporary Catalan politics.

The first elections to the *Vlaamse Parlement* occurred in 1995. Recall that the *Vlaamse Raad* (Flemish Council) was formed in 1971, but directly elected regional parliamentary governing did not occur until the switch to the *Vlaamse Parlement* in 1995. These elections saw, most notably, the Christian Democratic and Flemish Party (CD&V) win 37 of the 124 seats, the Flemish

Liberals and Democrats (VLD) win 27, the Socialist Party (SP) win 26, and the Flemish Block won 17.

In these 1995 elections to the *Vlaamse Parlement*, Flemish regional parties were quite successful, as the Belgian party system was in the process of being regionalized. The SP, a Belgian party, also gained a relatively large number of seats in this regional legislature.

The most recent elections in Flanders, the 2014 *Vlaamse Parlement* elections, resulted in a victory for the pro-secessionist New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), with them receiving 42 seats. The CD&V won 26 seats, the Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats (Open Vld) won 17 seats, the Socialist Party Differently (sp.a) also won 17, and the Flemish Interest won 6 seats (*Statista*, 2014).

The Flemish electorate spoke loudly and clearly in 2014 at the polls. Regional parties dominated the 2014 elections to the *Vlaamse Parlement*. The regionalization of the party system in Belgium is clear. The Flemish are voting for Flemish parties and the Walloons are voting for Walloon parties (Swenden and Jans, 2009). Several decades after the beginning of the Belgian federalization project with the creation of the regional legislative institutions and the devolution process, regional parties dominate the Belgian political system. Unlike in Catalonia, there has been no organized referendum on Flemish secession. This lack of referenda is perhaps due to the strength of the Flemish regional parties at not only the regional level but also at the state-wide, Belgian level (in the Belgian Parliament) (Burg, 2015).

The first election to the modern Scottish Parliament occurred in 1999. This election saw the Labour Party winning 56 of the 129 seats, the Scottish National Party (SNP) winning 35, the Conservative Party winning 18, and the Liberal Democratic Party winning 17. The Labour Party, which had historically dominated Scottish electoral politics, continued to show its strength throughout the first few elections to the Scottish Parliament.

The 2007 Scottish Parliamentary elections proved to be a big turning point in the progression of the Scottish secessionist movement in the post-devolution time period. The SNP won 47 seats, earning one more seat than the Labour Party. This was the first time that the SNP had garnered a plurality of the votes in *Holyrood* and it would not be the last. The SNP has won every election since, including the most recent, 2016 elections. In these 2016 elections, the SNP won 63 seats, the Conservative Party won 31, and the Labour Party won 24 (Graham and Henderson, 2016).

These 2016 elections were a clear victory for the pro-secessionist SNP. Scottish party politics have clearly been regionalized as support for the Scottish regional party has been increasing and support for non-Scottish parties has been decreasing. The Labour Party has felt the effects of this shift of Scottish support towards the SNP as it struggles to garner enough seats to exert the influence that it previously possessed in Westminster (Töngür, 2014).

On 15 October 2012, the Edinburgh Agreement was signed by the United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron, Scottish Secretary of State Michael Moore, Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond, and Deputy First Minister (and future First Minister) Nicola Sturgeon. The Edinburgh Agreement was an agreement that legalized and set plans for a referendum on Scottish independence. Both governments agreed that the referendum would be legislated by the Scottish Parliament, be conducted in a manner that both Parliaments could be confident that it was fair, free, and representative of the views of the Scottish people, and that the result will be respected by both Scotland and the United Kingdom. The referendum was scheduled for 18 September 2014 (Töngür, 2014). Unlike the referendum that took place in Catalonia less than two months later, the Scottish independence referendum was legal in the sense that it has been negotiated and agreed to by both the Scottish Parliament (SNP) and the British Parliament.

Following the signing of the Edinburgh Agreement, the Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democratic parties all jointly promised to “guarantee to start [swiftly] delivering more powers to the Scottish Parliament” (Töngür, 2014), although what exactly these powers were to be remained quite unclear. The creation of the Scottish Parliament and its accompanied devolved powers were now having an effect in Westminster, as party leaders feared a Scottish departure from the union. In the time between the signing of the Edinburgh Agreement in October 2012 and the Scottish independence referendum in September 2014, the United Kingdom’s government published several booklets and pamphlets on the benefits of staying in the United for Scotland and its people. The UK promoted the claims that Scotland is stronger economically, politically, and militarily within the United Kingdom than it would be by itself (Töngür, 2014).

Clearly the Scottish electorate favored a secessionist party in their most recent elections, but this was no guarantee that they would do the same in a referendum. On 18 September 2014, over 1.6 million Scots went out to the polls to vote in the referendum. The Scottish Parliament lowered the voting age from 18 to 16 for the referendum, assuming that younger Scots were more likely to favor independence. Despite the success of the pro-independence SNP in recent Scotland, British, and European elections, the referendum was not successful. The “No” vote won. More than 53 percent of Scots that participated in the referendum voted against independence and in favor of remaining a part of the United Kingdom. This result came as a huge relief to the United Kingdom and as a shock to the SNP, who was convinced that independence was on the horizon. The Scottish Parliament’s First Minister and SNP leader Alex Salmond announced following the referendum that he was stepping down from both positions. Nicola Sturgeon became the new First Minister of Scotland in November 2014 (Töngür, 2014).

Both Catalonia and Scotland held referendums on independence in the fall of 2014. The Catalan referendum, which was unofficial, illegal, and had very low voter turnout (possibly for these reasons), resulted in a ‘victory’ for the secessionists as a majority of those who voted supported Catalan secession from Spain. In Scotland, an official, legal referendum took place in which the secessionists, headed by the SNP, lost. The Scottish electorate voted to remain a member of the United Kingdom, to the surprise of many. In Flanders, no such referendum, official or unofficial, has taken place.

It is clear in all three cases – Catalonia, Flanders, and Scotland – that the party systems have been regionalized. The vast majority of the electorate in all three regions has voted for regional parties and not for state-wide parties. This phenomenon is very important because in all three cases, the shift to this regionalization of the party system has come following the creation of a regional legislature and a major devolution of powers to this new regional level.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEVOLUTION: REGIONALIZATION AND SECESSIONISM

A push for devolution by a sub-state region with secessionist sentiments creates a serious dilemma for states. Should the state create a regional legislative institution for this region? Will devolving various powers to this region appease their claims for secession or will it just facilitate future moves towards secession?

Spain is quite a unique case because the process of federalization and devolution in Spain occurred during a period of democratization, which presented its own challenges. However, it is clear that the creation of *El Parlament de Catalunya* and the powers that were devolved to it created an environment in which Catalan regional parties could flourish. It is evident that as decades have passed since this major act of devolution, the strength of the Catalan regional parties has grown much stronger.

This phenomenon of regionalization is perhaps even more evident in Belgium. Belgium, which prior to 1970 was a centralized state, made the decision to federalize the state in order to appease many of the Flemish members of Belgian Parliament. Prior to the creation of the *Vlaamse Raad* and its later transition to the *Vlaamse Parlement*, Belgian-wide parties performed very well in Belgian elections and the few Flemish regional parties struggled. Following the establishment of the *Vlaamse Parlement*, Flemish regional parties grew in numbers and in strength. Flemish parties were able to gain more access to power via the *Vlaamse Parlement* than they had not previously been able to do within the Belgian Parliament. Now, a few decades after this process of federalization and devolution began, nearly all of the Flemish votes go to Flemish parties and

Walloon votes go to Walloon parties. The Belgian party system has been completely regionalized and this is largely due to the creation of the *Vlaamse Parlement* and the devolution of competencies and powers to the regional level in Belgium (see: Brancati, 2008).

This regionalization of the party system also took place in Scotland. Prior to the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and its subsequent acquisition of devolved powers, Scotland's regional party, the Scottish National Party (SNP), had never held any seats in the British Parliament. Following the creation of the Scottish Parliament, the SNP was able to obtain seats and, in turn, influence, in Edinburgh. This influence was important for the party as they were later able to win seats in the British Parliament, as well. Now, the SNP dominates the Scottish electorate, winning a vast majority of the seats in Edinburgh's *Holyrood* and the majority of Scotland's seats in Westminster. Of course, there is a limit on the amount of seats that the SNP can obtain in Westminster due to the party's regional nature, but its influence in *Holyrood* should not be overlooked. Clearly, the Scottish party system has been regionalized since this major act of devolution within the United Kingdom in 1999. Scotland used to predominantly support the Labour Party, but today, mostly supports the SNP, their regional party.

The regional legislative institutions in Catalonia, Flanders, and Scotland are all now controlled by parties that are explicitly secessionist (JxSí in Catalonia, N-VA in Flanders, and the SNP in Scotland). The strength of these secessionist parties is largely due to the devolution that took place. Secessionist parties are emboldened and strengthened by their ability to gain seats within these newly created regional legislative institutions (Brancati, 2008).

One major and obvious difference between the Scottish secessionist movement and the secessionist movements in Catalonia and Flanders is that the Scottish secessionist movement is represented by a single secessionist party rather than multiple secessionist parties. This unification

under one secessionist party allows for a single, unified message for secession that is presented to the Scottish electorate. The Scottish National Party (SNP) is able to be so electorally successful within Scotland due to its lack of competition by other regional parties and its encompassing secessionist platform. This scenario is different in both Catalonia and Flanders where there are several regional parties and more than one secessionist party.

This key difference in the regionalized party systems can largely be accounted to the differences in the state structures and voting systems in both pre-devolution and post-devolution time periods. As discussed previously, in the United Kingdom, elections are operated on the basis of a plurality (first past the post) electoral system. This system limits the number of parties that are able to compete and squeezes out small parties. Once the regionalization of the Scottish party system took effect following devolution, the long-established SNP was able to assume the dominant role. Due to the system in place, it would be difficult for another, smaller Scottish party to overtake the influence of the SNP. In both Catalonia and Flanders, a system of proportional representation is utilized, making it easier for smaller parties to compete. This system creates an environment in which multiple parties are able to gain access to the government, providing for a more competitive environment amongst these regional parties.

The claims for secession that are made by the secessionist movements, often through these secessionist parties, are important to consider. Recall the previous discussion on the claims making of the secessionist movements. The pre-devolution claims of the Catalan secessionist movement focused on cultural and linguistic claims, the Flemish secessionist movement also focused on cultural and linguistic claims, while the Scottish secessionist movement centered on political claims. Both the Catalan and Flemish claims for secession changed following the major act of



devolution. The Catalan secessionist movement now focuses more heavily on economic claims for secession and the Flemish movement on political claims for secession.

The Catalan and Flemish cultural and linguistic claims have largely been mitigated and alleviated via the process of devolution and the creation of regional legislative institutions in which cultural and linguistic issues are devolved to this regional level. Therefore, a shift in the claims making of the secessionist movements should not have been surprising.

The economic claims in Catalonia are frequently referenced by some of the more prominent Catalan secessionist parties (e.g. JxSí). Economic claims for secession can potentially be alleviated through further devolution of powers to *El Parlament de Catalunya*. This move, however, would be risky on the part of the Spanish as they run the risk that providing greater economic autonomy to the regional level and, in turn, the regional and secessionist parties could fuel the fire for independence even greater (see: Kriacou and Morral-Palacín, 2014).

The political claims in Flanders are very interesting due to the fact that the Flemish occupy a majority of the population of Belgium. Many of these political concerns, mostly regarding autonomy and the devolution and federalization of the country, are mitigated by the fact that the Flemish are very strong in the national legislature. This strength is in stark contrast to the Catalans and the Scottish who have little strength in their respective national legislatures.

The Scottish case is unique in the sense that the secessionist movement's claims for secession have remained relatively consistent. The main claims are political and primarily focus around the idea that the Scottish are not properly represented in London nor are they adequately involved in the United Kingdom's decision-making processes. This issue, unlike the Catalan and Flemish grievances, is much more difficult to be resolved. Scotland occupies only a small percentage of the population of the United Kingdom and increasing its representation in

Westminster inherently means that the level of representation of some or all of the other three members of the union would need to be decreased. This scenario would be nearly impossible politically to execute. In Scotland, the creation of the Scottish Parliament and its accompanying devolution did little to alleviate the concerns of the Scottish whilst simultaneously providing a greater platform and strength to Scotland's secessionist party, the SNP.

In Catalonia and Flanders, where the creation of regional legislative institutions did alleviate many of the original grievances and claims for secession, provoking a change in claims making and a shift within and amongst the secessionist parties. It would seem that the claims making of the Scottish secessionist movement is more serious, in the sense that alleviating the issues behind the claims seems to be the most difficult. Whilst both Scotland and Flanders predominantly use political claims for secession, the Flemish case is different due to their strong position within Belgium's national government whilst the Scottish maintain a weak position within the United Kingdom's national government. The effect (or lack thereof in Scotland) of the creation of regional legislative institutions, devolution, and the subsequent regionalization of the party systems on the claims making of the secessionist parties is a strong example of how this major act of devolution has had implications and affected the three secessionist movements. Examining the claims making and the change in claims making of these secessionist movements provides insight into how the creation of the regional legislative institutions and devolution have affected the secessionist movements and the secessionist parties.

#### *Modern societal relevance*

It has become clear that when a state chooses to establish a regional legislative institution and devolve various powers and competencies to this new institution, it creates a situation in which the region's party system will become regionalized. The regionalization of the party system creates

an environment in which a secessionist movement, through one or more secessionist parties, can gain strength, support, and influence. This situation brings about an important question: Is it better for the state to create a regional legislative institution and to devolve powers to it or is it preferable for the state to effectively do nothing when it comes to this region with a secessionist sentiment? This question, of course, assumes that the best-case scenario for the state is that the region remains a part of the state.

The evidence found by this study leads to the conclusion that it would be best for a Western liberal democratic state to ignore the calls for devolution and autonomy by a sub-state region with secessionist sentiments. While it is not ideal for this state to have a part of its country demanding political change via the process of devolution, it is still preferable to have to handle this complaint than it is to institute this devolution. This devolution will likely lead to a strengthening of the region's regional parties which could have serious political effects throughout the rest of the state (i.e. the effect that SNP success has had on the British Labour Party). Additionally, this devolution and subsequent regionalization of the party system can provide opportunities for secessionist parties that can actually make the calls for secession even more centralized, organized, and politically relevant. So while a state may *think* that it will alleviate or mitigate calls for secession by one of its regions, it is for these crucial reasons that it would be best for the state to avoid creating a regional legislative institution and devolution.

On the flip side, it would appear that a good strategy for secessionist movements would be to push for the creation of a regional legislative institution that they could use to further their cause. While this process may seem hard to do, it has been done several times throughout modern history, including in the Catalan, Flemish, and Scottish cases. All three secessionist movements have used the creation of this new regional institution and its subsequent effects to further their claims for

independence and push for secession from their respective states. The appetite for secession continues to be very strong in all three regions (Coppeters, 2012).

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