

Mateo Larrazabal

251079231

Temesghen Naizghi

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### Secession: Is it worth it?

Secession, a group's desire to achieve complete self-determination, has grown in relevance as of late. Despite the unprecedented globalization of the current age, groups are rising up against central authorities in pursuit of sovereignty. However, efforts to achieve self-determination are often questioned, given the arduous challenges related to achieving independence. I argue that secession is not a worthwhile endeavour by analyzing issues encountered by the cases of Quebec and Catalonia. Despite the fact that these movements peaked in different eras, they are inextricably linked due to both regional governments wielding considerable power and strong support from the public. I will prove this claim by first explaining the impact of a globalized economy in Catalonia, devolution's ability to quell separatist fervour in Quebec, and finally comparing the successful approaches to multiculturalism in Catalonia with the failures of the Québécois sovereigntist movement.

I begin by arguing that a successful secessionist movement would suffer economically due to the globalized nature of today's trade, of which the effects could take several years to eliminate and drastically change the economic outlook of the nation. Despite the increasingly pro-free trade environment of the world economy, an independent state would need to seek out agreements with other nations to reduce or eliminate the various regulations and fees applied to importing and exporting products

(Castells 277). In the case of an independent Catalonia, increased trade friction with Spain, its largest trade partner, would harm the local economy (Castells 289). Catalanian products would not be able to compete with firms from Spain and the rest of the European Union (De La Torre 329). A poor economic environment could cause capital flight in Catalonia, as companies leave for better business climates (De La Torre 329). Moreover, given that secession often involves two polarized parties, it is unlikely that an economic agreement could be made between a new state and its former central government (Castells 294). As such, secession is not worthwhile due to the severe repercussions of increased trade friction that would fall upon a newly independent state.

In objection to the aforementioned, the effects of an economic slowdown would be diminished due to the new administration's ability to implement necessary reforms before the complete implementation of trade regulation. Tax funds which previously went to the central government would be in the possession of the new state, granting additional flexibility to implement state-led programs (Castells 292). Moreover, due to the unprecedented period of worldwide trade liberalization, countries now sell products all over the world, lessening the dependence on a single partner (Castells 289). Such an effect is abundantly clear in Catalonia's economy, which has decreased exports to the rest of Spain from 63.5% in 1995 to 47.1% in 2011 (Castells 289). In addition, the Catalanian government would have complete control over the economic future of the country, a stark change from the central government's history of promulgating legislation that inhibited Catalan growth (Castells 292). Improved political decision making would have a permanent effect on the new state, as legislation would be enacted to benefit the national interest. Therefore, one can conclude that independence

is an economically feasible endeavour, as an empowered government would nullify the short-term consequences.

Nevertheless, a major issue that has not been taken into account is the economic effect of international recognition. By entering the global community, the country is granted access to markets and resources all around the world that help sustain and kickstart the fledgling economy (Muro, Vidal et al. 180). Achieving recognition from great powers of the world, such as the United States, China, Russia, and the United Kingdom grant the new state legitimacy and encourages the rest of the world to follow suit (Muro, Vidal et al. 179). The unanimous international response rejecting the Catalanian Declaration of Independence in 2017 effectively limited Catalonia to an independent state in name only (Muro, Vidal et al. 177). Regardless if a new state were to emerge, it would not be able to thrive and prosper due to its exclusion from international institutions, essentially relegating it to informal economic exchanges to survive (Muro, Vidal et al. 180). As such, the argument that sovereignty grants countries economic freedom is defeated. From hosting rallies to referendums, the process of achieving independence is lengthy and arduous. The failure to receive international recognition renders these efforts as pointless, as the economy is unable to function properly.

Having discussed the economic challenges to secession, I will now explain how political devolution reduces separatist sentiments. Decentralization strengthens regional governments, as they have greater legislative power over their jurisdiction. An empowered local authority gives citizens the confidence that a transition to independence would be seamless by virtue of the government's experience with leading large-scale public institutions, such as healthcare and education (Dion 280). However,

devolution makes it harder to convince citizens that the central government is an oppressive force working against their interests, an effect which decreases public interest in independence (Dion 279). Said impact has been found in Quebec, as a 1993 Canadian federal election poll found that reforming the constitution, a key issue which inspired a record high in support for Québécois sovereignty, ranked last in a list of ten topics, behind issues such as unemployment and crime (Dion 281). While devolution may inspire a renewed desire for self-determination, the intensity of said movement is greatly diminished. Devolution grants greater power to citizens and prevents the emergence of a widespread anti-central government sentiment. Seeking secession is not an advantageous endeavour, as devolution satisfies the general population's demands.

In spite of this, a widespread sense of suspicion towards the central government due to its treatment of member states. The failure by federal governments to grant distinct societies special recognition causes groups to feel as if their unique way of life is under threat, a problem which can only be remedied via secession. In the case of Quebec, various attempts to reform the constitution to accommodate the status of the Québécois peoples within Canada sparked a wave of sovereigntist sentiment (Dion 281). In a series of 1991 polls revealed that only 26% of Quebecers found the relationship with the rest of Canada as beneficial (Blais, Nadeau 92). Groups are not sufficiently protected under a devolved system where subnational regions are granted equal amounts of power (Kylmicka 128). In providing special recognition to distinct regions, the central government recognizes a unique society by providing additional legislative powers not shared by other subnational regions (Kylmicka 127). However,

this is nigh on impossible to achieve due to opposition from the ethnic majority of the nation (Kylmicka 127). Through secession, one is able to protect and preserve the survival of one's distinct culture, thereby making said efforts meaningful and noble.

While devolution seemingly does not meet the needs of the people, having two levels of government develops a citizen who identifies with both their region and the nation, thereby diminishing secessionist sentiments (Guibernau 71). This is clear in Quebec, where despite the rich history of regional nationalism, it was reported in 2003 that 79% of Quebecers had a sense of attachment to Canada (Guibernau 68). Moreover, the high percentage of citizens identifying with Canada is in spite of the fact that 55% of Québécois reported that they were being treated unfairly by the federal government (Guibernau 68). Devolution satisfies the demands of local elites by offering them power and prestige through an empowered regional government wherein politicians have the freedom to implement various changes to their jurisdiction (Guibernau 71). Québécois culture is preserved through the local authorities' powers governing education, employment, and language, where pro-Francophone policies have been implemented (Guibernau 52). While decentralizing power does strengthen attachment to one's region, it does not lead to a widespread movement demanding complete sovereignty. Through a strong regional government, many of the issues concerning constituents are resolved in a legislature specifically catered to serving said region. As such, secession satisfies the demand for self-determination by offering citizens the power to preserve their unique society locally while being able to voice their concerns through the national legislature.

My last argument explains why secession is not a worthwhile struggle due to the rise of multiculturalism, which has eroded the idea of the ethnic nation-state. The embrace of diversity worldwide has relegated the idea of protecting one's culture via independence to obscurity. Quebec, a place where thousands have flocked to in search of a better life, is a case wherein multiculturalism has posed a major challenge to separatist movements (Piche 20). Large-scale immigration has created a considerable portion of the population that does not identify with the local culture and by extension, secession (Piche 20). Given the fact that the independence movement's main tenet is protecting Québécois culture and the French language, the foreign-born population are a major voting bloc that is vehemently against leaving Canada (Piche 20). Achieving self-determination would not be reflective of the population, which could create ethnically based issues in the new state. In a multicultural society, diversity protects cultures by celebrating the different traditions of peoples. In doing so, a key principle of secession is achieved, which therefore defeats the purpose of achieving independence. The decline of the ethnic nation-state has left secession as a useless pursuit from a previous age.

While societies are certainly no longer culturally homogenous, pursuing secession remains a valuable pursuit. Local governments have begun to take advantage of immigrants by enacting policies that attempt to involve new citizens to form a sense of belonging within their communities. Instead of forging an identity through ethnicity, regions have taken to creating a national community through common language and a clear territorial boundary, as seen in Catalonia (Conversi and Jeram 59). Despite a wave of immigration from Latin America, North Africa, and Asia beginning

in the 1990s, Catalonian society has managed to preserve its identity as a distinct society within Spain (Conversi and Jeram 58). Authorities have promoted social cohesion by supporting Catalan as the *lingua franca* of the region (Conversi and Jeram 59). In adopting a more civic form of nationalism that values equality and tolerance, immigrants are included in the nation and the prospects for secession are protected as foreigners are no longer marginalized (Conversi and Jeram 62)). While immigrants currently are not staunch supporters of independence, the gap in support for secession between ethnic and immigrant Catalans is narrowing, partly due to the inclusive approach headed by the government (Conversi and Jeram 62). By adopting more inclusive policies, separatist movements can re-invent themselves and thrive in a multicultural age. As a result of this change, secession remains a noble ambition that continues to hold value today.

Despite the fact that civic nationalism has helped integrate immigrants to the region, clashes in traditions between cultures inhibits the development of an inclusive society. For example, immigrants often identify with a different religion than that of what the majority of the population does. In the case of Quebec, the tradition of *laïcité*, the policy of secularism in the public sphere, has dampened the image of the independence movement (Dupré 229). The rise in tensions with religious policy has shifted the definition of the Québécois nation from the French language to emphasizing a strictly secular society (Dupré 229). Such a shift has impeded the development of an inclusive form of nationalism in the region, as immigrants, who tend to be more religious, are now under attack from the regional government (Dupré 229). In doing so, the civic nationalism bound together by a common language is being undermined by efforts from

the Québécois majority to preserve their traditions within the institutional framework of the state (Dupré 230). The differences in cultures eventually leads to fissures between foreigners and their hosts, which reduces the tolerant attitude of society. As such, secessionism's tendency to rely upon exclusionary ethnic nationalism proves it is an outdated idea no longer worth pursuing in today's age.

To conclude, secession is an outdated idea that is not worth pursuing given the economic, political, and cultural conditions of today's world. I argued that trade friction, decentralized power distribution, and the emergence of multiculturalism as factors explaining why seeking independence is no longer worthwhile. From analyzing the various successes and failures found in Quebec and Catalonia, it is clear that secession is not an advantageous investment of time and resources. Nevertheless, independence movements remain extremely relevant in today's fragmented geopolitical landscape and deserves to be followed closely.



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