Secessionism in the New Europe

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Key Questions

- What is “secessionism” in the European context?
- What are the sources of secessionism?
- How have central governments responded, and with what consequences?
  - Political & economic uncertainty
  - Regional institutional development (below and above)
  - Secessionist demands
- How likely is an actual secession in Europe within the next several years?
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“Secessionist” movement – a movement that supports:

1. “significant” political autonomy for the national group
2. a right to self-determination for the national group (independence not ruled out, contra “regionalism”)

All secessionism is conditional (e.g., Scottish National Party [SNP], Catalan Convergence and Unity [CiU])

Autonomy itself is a continuum; “independence” is never unconditional (e.g., European Union member states, Isle of Man, Quebec, Basque Country)
Conceptualizing Secessionism

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Theorizing Secessionism

- Minority cultural distinctiveness + territorial concentration → “nation” as fundamental political unit (for some group members)
- Group interests → political status demands
  - Fiscal transfers
  - Population (viability)
  - Ideological differences
  - Geographic separation & ports (trade)
  - Existing autonomy?
  - Economic conditions?
  - Demonstration effects?
  - Policy concessions unlikely to work because of commitment problem
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Central Government Responses

- Decentralization
  - Partisan logic: office-holding value versus electoral value (e.g., Britain, Spain, Italy, Belgium, France)

- Referendums and the “right to decide”
  - Canada, Britain, Belgium vs. France, Spain, Italy
  - Global evidence
  - Political & economic uncertainty
  - Unlikelihood of success

- European Union issues
  - “Europe of the regions”
  - Right to join EU
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Current Challenges

- Scotland
- Catalonia
- Basque Country
- Flanders
- Faroes
- Corsica
Scotland

- Strong ideological motivations for independence, weak economic interest
- Polls show 2014 referendum likely to fail
- SNP remains popular
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- Strong economic interest in independence
- Pro-independence left-right coalition (Republican Left-CiU)
- CiU divided
- Central government intransigent
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- “Free association” referendum controversy
- Secular decline in secessionist support
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Constitutional rules weaken central government, but also soften Flemish Christian Democrats’ resolve
* Cordon sanitaire has precluded independentist regional coalition, but that may change
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Faroes

- Modest economic interest in independence
- Independence coalition (1998-2002) lost nerve and popular support
- Accommodating central government
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- Ideological polarization makes even autonomy unlikely (defeated referendum, 2005)
- Low-level violence and polarization likely to continue
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